

SALMAN RUSHDIE:
I WON'T GIVE IN
I'll have my revenge
in the end, he tells
Susan Chenery
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**THE SECRET OF
HAGUE'S SUCCESS**
Underestimate him
at your peril,
says Anthony Bevins
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THE INDEPENDENT

Newspaper of the Year for photographs

Monday 13 April 1998 45p (IR 50p) No 3,583

Worst floods for 100 years, and there is more to come

By Andrew Buncombe

THE GOVERNMENT last night pledged help for areas devastated by the floods which have left five people dead as warnings were issued of the threat of further deluges.

John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, said on a visit to several towns in the Midlands that the Government would do all it could to as-

sist the local authorities as they turned to repairing damage estimated at £500m.

He also paid tribute to the "remarkable spirit" of the people who had dealt with Britain's worst flooding for a century.

Speaking in Stratford-upon-Avon - which had been turned into a lake as waters rose by 8ft in two hours - he said: "It's the spirit of the peo-

ple that's remarkable."

As Mr Prescott saw first hand the effects of the devastation, there were reports that parts of East Anglia were next in line for flooding, with the rivers Nene and Ouse dangerously high.

Police said residents in parts of Peterborough in Cambridgeshire should prepare to evacuate their homes within the next few hours.

Troops and police officers would tour the streets ready to help.

A spokeswoman for the Environment Agency said the Nene was expected to burst its banks along a wide area of the city, and hundreds of properties were likely to be hit.

Five people have been killed by the floods. Two people were found dead on Good Friday and police have confirmed another three deaths.

Officers recovered the body of 14-year-old Carl Giles, who drowned when the milk van he was in was swept away by flooding at Eashope, Warwickshire.

Another victim, a 59-year-old man from Cwmbran, South Wales, collapsed and died from suspected hypothermia as he walked home. Estelle Lean, 76, was found wandering in a snow-covered field yes-

terday morning after being missing overnight in freezing conditions.

She was spotted by the crew of the Dyfed-Powys Police helicopter after a major air and ground search was launched after she went missing from her daughter's house near Carmarthen. A row erupted last night amid claims from villagers that they were hit by floods because au-

thorities tried to limit damage to Banbury by opening sluice and flood gates. Insurance companies are preparing themselves for a £500m payout on damage. Meteorologists are predicting that the unusually cold weather would continue. The country is likely to have showers of hail, sleet or snow for several days.

Pictures, page 4
Leading article, page 16

Unionist MPs fight Trimble on peace deal

By David McKittrick
Ireland Correspondent

DAVID TRIMBLE, the Ulster Unionist leader, last night faced mounting problems in selling the new British-Irish agreement to his party, with a series of senior figures coming out against it.

At least five of his ten MPs have emerged as opponents of the deal, with others in the party hierarchy also hostile, including his predecessor, Lord Molyneaux.

Mr Trimble appeared initially to have won a solid endorsement for the new deal which he played a crucial role in putting together. But with an array of opponents now emerging, he will clearly have a fight on his hands as he seeks party endorsement.

On Saturday, his party's executive committee voted by 5-23 in support of the agreement, recommending it to the much larger meeting of the party council which will take place at the end of the week.

The vital vote on the agreement is scheduled for Saturday next, when around 800 members of the ruling Ulster Unionist Council are to give their verdict at a special meeting in Belfast. The opinions of the MPs are not vital on such occasions but they carry great weight.

The deal - and indeed any participation in the peace

process - has been opposed for some months by MPs William Ross, William Thompson, Roy Beggs and Clifford Forsythe. It was also belatedly opposed by Jeffrey Donaldson, who left the talks building on Friday shortly before the deal was concluded.

Mr Donaldson was one of the party's chief negotiators at Stormont and had been regarded as one of Mr Trimble's closest aides before swerving sharply in recent weeks. Mr Trimble said on Saturday he was encouraged by an assurance from Mr Donaldson that he would not split the party.

It is now known that a number of the party's negotiating team in the talks also came out against it before Friday's closing plenary session. Most of these are regarded as being from the party's younger and more militant faction.

The sixth MP who is said to be against the deal is the Rev Martin Smyth - a former grand master of the Orange Order, who was in Australia when it was concluded. Although he has yet to confirm it, others in the anti-deal camp regard him as being on their side.

In addition, Lord Molyneaux - who led the party for almost two decades until Mr Trimble took over in 1995 - is also opposed. This means that Mr Trimble can only count on the support of three parliamentary

colleagues - John Taylor, Ken Maginnis and Cecil Walker.

While Members of Parliament are not central in the complicated structure of the Ulster Unionist Party, the array of opposition represents a formidable battery of big guns. An important meeting of the Orange Order is to be held in Belfast on Wednesday, and it will come as a blow to Mr Trimble if this comes out against the deal.

Mr Trimble said: "Of course some people have doubts and reservations. Whoever heard of a party where there weren't differences of view? We are not some Stalinist organisation. We are the most democratic political body in these islands. I think people who believe this issue will divide the party are being unduly pessimistic."

On the republican side, the Sinn Fein president, Gerry Adams, yesterday urged all activists to examine the document in great detail, to consider whether "the struggle" had been advanced, and to consider how it could be advanced further.

Sinn Fein is also likely to contain many who will have considerable problems with the document, containing as it does many elements traditionally opposed by republicans. The party holds its *ard-thais* (annual conference) in Dublin next weekend, when the views of the grassroots will become clearer.

Historic opportunity, page 2



Pulpit Invasion: Peter Tatchell and OutRage! protesters interrupting the Archbishop of Canterbury's Easter sermon yesterday. Photograph: Adrian Arbib

Tatchell charged after disrupting Carey's sermon

By Louise Jury

GAY RIGHTS campaigner Peter Tatchell was yesterday charged with "riotous or violent" behaviour after dramatically disrupting the Archbishop of Canterbury's Easter sermon.

Mr Tatchell, 46, said that he had been bailed to appear at Canterbury and St Augustines magistrates' court next month. He said he had been charged with an offence contrary to section 2 of the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act of 1860

with the offence of "riotous or violent" behaviour in a church.

Supported by half a dozen members of the OutRage! gay campaign group with placards, Mr Tatchell climbed into the pulpit where Dr George Carey had just begun his address. He shouted: "Dr Carey supports discrimination against lesbian and gay people. He opposes lesbian and gay human rights. This is not Christian teaching."

To the amazement of the Canterbury cathedral congregation of 2,000 people, Mr

Tatchell was silenced only when a senior police officer and stewards pulled him down and marched him from the building.

Dr Carey then continued his sermon, saying simply: "This has happened before and it will doubtless happen again. Let's go back to the service."

Afterwards, the archbishop said he was saddened by the disruption, which he did not think helped the cause of gay rights.

Mr Tatchell has become one of the most outspoken campaigners for gay rights since he stood for Labour in Bermondsey in a 1983 by-election. He lost a previously safe seat after a vicious campaign which speculated on

his sexuality. He came out as homosexual two months later. Last year, he invaded the grounds of Lambeth Palace to protest against Dr Carey's stance, but left after the archbishop said his manner was offensive.

John Hunt, one of the other OutRage! protesters at the cathedral, said last night that the campaigners believed Dr Carey's opposition to gay civil rights was "a perversion of Christ's gospel of love and compassion".

Pope's Easter message, page 12

Last chance for church, page 3

Millennium bug could bring us an extended bank holiday

By Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

THE Bank of England is suggesting that the three-day Millennium Holiday, at the end of next year, be extended by a day to help overcome problems posed by the millennium computer bug.

A more drastic call, for a world-wide one-week holiday in

the first week of the new millennium was made to an international conference organised by the Bank for International Settlements, in Basel, last week.

With fears growing about the consequences of Year 2000 (Y2K) computer crashes, Don Crickshank, chairman of the Government-backed Action 2000 campaign, told *The Inde-*

pendent that many people who think they will be celebrating the new millennium - on holiday - will, in fact, be working flat out, trying to deal with the millennium bug. The impending crisis is threatened by the fact that many computers have not been programmed to distinguish between 2000 and 1900 when their two-digit dates change to 00 from the end of next year.

The consequences of chain-link "crashes" between computers are completely unknown, and Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, had warned: "We face a day of judgment on that first day of the year 2000. The IT systems on which the entire business community now depends are not capable, at least in part, of recognising or responding predictably to dates

beyond the end of this century." The Bank of England says the continuation of orderly markets might not be possible if a large enough proportion of the participants are unable to trade or settle - and particularly if those still operating try to make a profit out of the situation.

Therefore, exchanges will be

closed the market altogether." The scale of the risks involved was underlined yesterday by a report saying that foreign exchange settlement failures could quadruple in the first week of January 2000, costing the markets as much as \$10bn in one week. In a speech to a Basel "Round Table on the Year 2000" last week, Edward Yardeni, chief economist with Deutsche

Morgan Grenfell in New York, called for the creation of an international Y2K Alliance to deal with the threat.

At the request of Tony Blair, the Group of Eight most developed nations are due to discuss the global implications of the millennium bug at their next summit, to be held in Birmingham next month.

Leading article, page 16

Today's news

Hour of discontent
Members of the biggest teacher's union, the NUT, yesterday demanded a delay in government plans for a new, daily "reading hour" in all primary schools. Page 2

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INSIDE GUIDE: WEATHER, P2 • CROSSWORD, P18 AND EYE P10 • TODAY'S TELEVISION, EYE P12 • LETTERS, P16 • SPORT TABLOID • FULL CONTENTS, P2

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TOMORROW

■ Full coverage of Easter Monday sport, including reports from every Premiership match

■ Would you ask your wife to take part in a drugs trial?

■ Calling in the cops: How Britain's clubs are fighting the drugs war

■ Dr Phil Hammond, and 'Britain on the Couch' with Oliver James

■ How Pavarotti changed my life, by Harvey Goldsmith



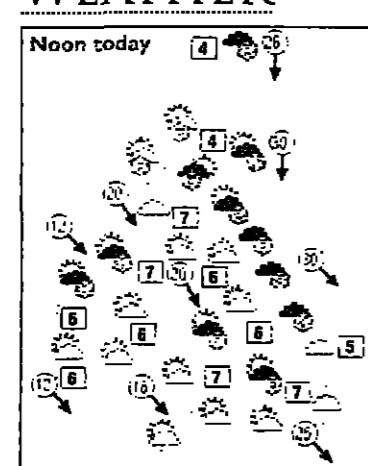
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Recycled paper made up 41.4% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1997.

WEATHER



Scotland will have another cold day with sun, showers and snow showers. The snow showers will be heaviest and most frequent in the north and east Northern Ireland, Wales, and central and western England will have sunny periods, but also wintry showers. East and south-east England will have a bleak, wintry morning with rain, sleet and snow. On higher ground in the extreme east some significant falls of snow are possible for a time, but the weather will improve this afternoon.

Outlook for the next few days
Tomorrow will be cold again everywhere with early frost in many places. The northern half of the UK will have sunny spells and wintry showers - the showers heaviest and most frequent in the afternoon with further snow over the Scottish hills. The south will have a longer spell of rain or sleet at first, especially in counties bordering the English Channel. The rest of the week will also be cold with more rain, sleet and hill snow.

British Isles weather

Most recent 24-hourly forecast for 1200 local time.

Cloudy, clear, Fair, Fog, light rain, Moderate rain, Slight, Slight, Showers, Slight, Showers, Slight, Thunder.

Aberdeen S 2 56 Guernsey S 3 37

Angleside F 7 37 Inverness S 1 29

Ayr S 7 45 Ipswich S 5 45

Belfast S 8 46 Isles of Scilly, T 15

Birmingham F 5 46 Jersey T 25

Blackpool F 7 45 Liverpool F 7 45

Bournemouth F 8 46 London F 7 45

Brighton F 6 45 Manchester F 7 45

Bristol S 8 45 Newcastle C 5 45

Cardiff S 8 45 Oxford S 6 45

Carlisle S 7 45 Plymouth S 5 45

Dover S 7 45 Scarborough S 1 25

Dublin H 13 43 Southampton S 6 45

Edinburgh C 6 43 Southend F 7 45

Exeter S 6 42 Stornoway S 4 35

Glasgow F 9 46 York C 7 45

High tides 4:16 HT 7:0 PM 9:1

London 02:59 7:0 15:56 7:1

Liverpool 09:00 12:9 21:17 9:1

Aberystwyth 08:07 6:5 20:21 9:6

Gibraltar 02:29 5:1 14:25 1:1

Dur Loughor 01:00 3:8 13:21 3:9

High tides in BST.

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British hostage shot dead, say guerrillas



Christopher Howes: Abducted in Cambodia two years ago

By Ian Burrell

MISSING mines clearance expert Christopher Howes was shot dead by Khmer Rouge guerrillas a week after his capture in Cambodia, it was claimed yesterday.

Mr Howes, from Clevedon near Bristol, was abducted in Cambodia more than two years ago and there has been no concrete evidence as to his fate since.

But according to a report in *Time* magazine, two former Khmer Rouge leaders have spoken about his death after defecting from the guerrilla organisation which is beset by

in-fighting. Yim Panna and Ke Pauk reportedly claimed that Mr Howes was shot in the back, on the orders of Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot himself, just one week after he was seized.

The pair said Mr Howes was shot near Anlong Veng, the Khmer Rouge's last stronghold, and his body was then burned.

A team from Scotland Yard, as well as Cambodian and Thai military intelligence, has carried out exhaustive inquiries into what happened to Mr Howes, without reaching a definite conclusion.

The Foreign Office said yesterday

the report was the latest in a stream of unconfirmed stories. A spokesman said: "There have been a very large number of rumours surrounding Christopher Howes but so far there is no conclusive evidence to show what has happened."

"It remains a very high priority to establish the truth."

"We are in very frequent contact with the Cambodian government and any other sources we think may have relevant information."

Mr Howes' father said from his home in Clevedon yesterday that he regarded the *Time* magazine report with "scepticism".

He said: "I treat it with the same scepticism I treat all these rumours."

"The people the writer has got it from have already been questioned by the British ambassador in Cambodia. This report is just an elaboration of a story we have heard before."

"He has now been killed at about six different dates, places and in six different ways. Until I have absolute proof he is dead, he is alive and he has to be got out."

A Foreign Office spokesman said British embassy officials in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh, had "almost certainly" interviewed the two

guerrilla leaders making the claims.

The report says Mr Howes' body was burned and then his bones were scattered over the ground. A tractor then reportedly cleared the bones, ploughing them into the earth in a rice field.

The claims were made by the two senior Khmer Rouge leaders during separate interviews.

Ke Pauk, 68, was commander of Cambodia's northern zone during Khmer rule 20 years ago and Yim Panna, 42, was a commander of Khmer Rouge division 980.

Yim Panna said of Mr Howes' death: "That was Pol Pot's rule. He

didn't want any foreigners involved in our country."

Ke Pauk named Mr Howes' killer as a soldier named Bao. He said three other soldiers, Tem, Kong and Noun, were also involved.

The latest report comes in the wake of a long line of rumours that have surrounded the fate of Mr Howes since he disappeared in March 1996.

On 27 April 1997, a £75,000 ransom was handed over to a man in Phnom Penh, against Foreign Office advice. The man had promised to secure Mr Howes' release. But nothing came of the promise.

Austin gives 'too liberal' Church one last chance

By Louise Jury

BRITAIN'S most outspoken priest is set to resign from the Church of England in protest at what he claims is the increasing dominance of liberals.

George Austin, the Archdeacon of York, will give the church one last chance to return to "traditional" beliefs at the Lambeth Conference, the 10-yearly gathering of clergy from around the world in July.

But he fears further liberalisation on key issues, specifically, the acceptance of homosexual relationships. Without reassurances, he will leave.

At 67, he is already past the statutory retirement age and was deprived of some of his influence when he lost his place on General Synod two

"of our integrity" were finding it difficult to get appointments, despite assurances made at the time of the vote in favour of the ordination of women in 1992.

"Every bishop of our persuasion who has retired has been replaced by one who isn't of our persuasion."

"In a sense it doesn't matter, because the real work is done in the parish, but nevertheless, that is where the influence is," he said.

However, he said he would never convert to Catholicism. "The Church of England is my home. It's not the Church of England teaching that has changed, but the people who are leading it who are trying to change it."

"There is a difference between the people in power and those in the pews."

The Rev Geoffrey Kirk, leader of the orthodox Forward in Faith movement set up in after the women's ordination vote, said many felt as George Austin did and their support was growing all the time.

"In the end, they will have to get rid of us or face up to the fact that they have a new radical church quite different from anything they have experienced before."

A Church of England spokesman said Mr Austin's views were well-known and the church would not comment on them.

Meanwhile, William Hague, the Conservative leader, yesterday expressed his own brand of religious belief.

Speaking in a Channel 5 interview with Kirsty Young, he said he was a Christian and went to church every month.

But he said: "I'm not someone who goes to church every Sunday morning. I would rather go for a walk in the Yorkshire dales in my constituency."

"If you want to feel God and close to nature, that can often be the best place to be. I think it is important to take those breaks in the outdoor world."

Asked whether Tony Blair wore his religion on his sleeve, Mr Hague said: "I don't mind if he does. We all approach religion in our own personal way. I'm not going to criticise him for that at all."

Increasingly, he said, priests

years ago.

Mr Austin said yesterday:

"There will be some serious issues at the Lambeth Conference and if they fudge them I think I will go. One of the key issues will be gay rights. There is a big movement to recognise gay relations and accept sodomy as Christian behaviour."

Mr Austin said he was struggling between weariness at the perpetual need to fight for basic Christian principles and the fear of letting people down if he did quit.

Asked whether he said, priests

Driver kills husband as he helps her to park

By Louise Jury

AN 80-year-old man was killed by the wife he taught to drive more than half a century ago as she attempted to park their car in a supermarket.

Police said it appeared that Alexander Neil was out of the vehicle directing his 85-year-old wife, Bertha back into a parking space when the accident happened.

Vehicle experts yesterday examined the couple's automatic Renault 25 car as Mrs Neil was being comforted at her home in Ickford near Thame, Oxfordshire.

Police are appealing for witnesses to the accident, which happened at the Budgen's supermarket in Thame at about 1pm on Saturday.

Yesterday, neighbours paid tribute to Mr Neil for his work in the community and told how his wife had recently returned to driving after his sight deteriorated.

Joyce Plessted, 72, said: "When his eyesight started to fail, she got back behind

the wheel. Eighty-five is a big age to be driving a car."

"If they had been in a road accident, it would have been easier, but she caused it. I don't think she'll ever get over it." She said Mr Neil had taught his wife of 58 years to drive when they were courting.

Mr Neil was born and raised in Ickford and followed his father into running the local dairy farm before retiring 10 years ago. He and his wife had no children. The longest-standing parish councillor, with 54 years' service, he had helped build the village hall which stands opposite the couple's home in 1950.

He was also president of the village football club and founder of the traditional annual tug o' war against the nearby village of Tiddington.

Mrs Neil was yesterday being comforted by family friend Ron Roberts.

He said: "She is very much in shock. It is a terrible thing. Everyone in Ickford knew him and the phone has not stopped ringing."



Man of many parts: 'Reviewers always seem surprised that I can act,' Mayall once said

Photograph: Keith Dobney

IN THE NEWS

RIK MAYALL

Strip, Blackadder, as the city politician Alan B'Stard in *The New Statesman* and Richie, a sort of older cousin of Rick's, in *Bottom*, another show with Edmondson.

It was Rick, the spotty twin of a student, who catapulted him to fame in 1982 in *The Young Ones*, the cult series he co-wrote with Edmondson and Lisa Moyer, his then girlfriend. To some, he has never escaped the Rick mantle. "Reviewers always seem surprised that I can act," he said once.

Yet the evidence is manifest.

He has won awards including, recently, an Emmy for voicing Mr Toad in two animated films of *The Wind in the Willows* and a Best Actor

award for *Bring Me The Head of Mavis Davis* from the San Remo Film Festival.

But his work has not only been lightweight. Until Stephen Fry's sudden breakdown and departure, Mayall had received good reviews for his role in Simon Gray's spy drama *Cell Mates*. And he recently finished *Remember Me?* a film by Michael Frayn with a cast including Robert Lindsay.

For the last 12 years, he has been married to Barbara, a former make-up artist he met while he was still living with Lisa Moyer.

In one of the messier parts

of his life, both women were pregnant when Mayall eloped to Barbados with Barbara and married her. Yet Ms Meyer, who lost her baby, remains his friend.

In recent interviews, Mayall had indicated a mellowing from the days when all he and Edmondson wanted were beer and women.

Last year, he had bought the home in the South Hams area of Devon as a retreat for his wife and three daughters, Rosie, 11, Sidney, nine, and two-year-old Bonnie. It was in

one of the fields there that Mrs Mayall found him trapped beneath his four-wheel bike.

Yesterday, she was "more optimistic" than earlier about his condition in a specialist neurological ward at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth.

"We think he is OK," she said. A hospital spokeswoman said they were almost through the critical initial 72-hour period of waiting for the brain to stop swelling. Doctors were "happy with his progress".

POULTRY suppliers are to learn about the body language of chickens and turkeys to ensure their birds have happy lives.

Tesco supermarket chain is to teach its suppliers to understand the behaviour of their birds as part of a new initiative on animal welfare.

Posters and videos interpreting common chicken and turkey expressions and movements will be given to Tesco chicken suppliers over the next 12 months.

Judith Abrehart, Tesco's agricultural manager, said: "There is absolutely no reason why any chicken or turkey should have to suffer during its life."

"We want every single worker to be able to recognise the signs which say that a bird might be in distress, so that action can be taken immediately."

She added: "Chicken body language is very different from other animals. The signals they send mean different things. Happy chickens speak with a quiet, contented little cheep noise. They love to bathe in dust, or preen, or forage."

Ms Abrehart continued: "Stressed out chickens will shout very loudly, with a piercing, persistent squawk."

Paul Whittington, who was appointed Tesco Animal Welfare Fellow at Bristol University this month, will spearhead the training programme.

He will help the supermarket's suppliers understand the latest research to implement new guidelines to protect animal welfare.

Ms Abrehart said: "We want to increase awareness among all poultry industry workers because they have the greatest impact upon the chicken's welfare."

"We want them to be able to listen to what each chicken is trying to tell them."

She added: "Many Tesco chicken suppliers also supply other supermarkets so there is no doubt that our competitors will also benefit from our efforts."

"We believe that improving animal welfare is far too important to let commercial rivalry stand in the way."

Tesco is funding a £30,000 Animal Welfare fellowship at Bristol University dedicated to putting the latest animal welfare research into practice.

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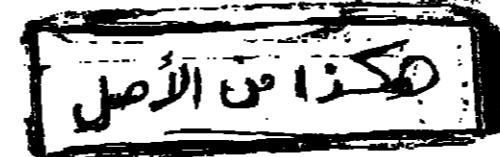
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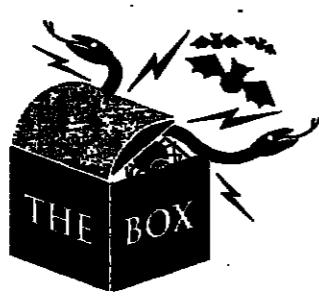
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**RAC to Rose's rescue**

JEFFREY Rose, the former chairman of the Royal Automobile Club who was forced out of his job after he wrote to members urging them to make a cash killing by floating off the RAC rescue service, kept his rather grand Bentley as part of his leaving package. Unfortunately, last week it broke down three times. Ironically, it was those helpful men in an RAC van who came to his rescue each time. Now why did Jeffrey ever think he could make do without them?

Trouble with truffles

NEW Yorkers who are fed up with Clinton's Zipplegate saga have a new oral scandal to occupy their frenetic minds: "Trufflegate". Apparently most of the city's top restaurants - Le Cirque 2000, Restaurant Daniel, Bouley and Jean-Georges - buy their truffles from an Italian company called Urbani Tartufi. Now Urbani has been caught with 100,000lb of illegal Chinese black truffles in one of its Italian warehouses. What's the difference? The Chinese variety sells for \$10 a pound while the Italian ones go for more than \$300. All the chefs, according to the *New York Post*, are adamant that they could not have been fooled into serving the inferior Chinese kind to their glittering customers. However, in Pandora's opinion the American public will swallow just about anything.

Nissan's hero Cedric

TONY Blair's admiration for the absurd neo-gothic Walter Scott potboiler *Ivanhoe* is apparently shared by much of the Japanese nation. The book is such a favourite that Nissan has named its top-of-the-line car after one of its characters: Cedric. Unfortunately, the vehicle is only sold in Japan. However, Pandora is happy to provide readers with a few ridiculous lines from the book, to wit: "He had thin silver bracelets upon his arms, and on his neck a collar of the same metal bearing the inscription, 'Wamba, the son of Witless, is the thrall of Cedric of Rotherwood.'"

The Prescott wake-up call

MARGARET and Leo Beckett occupy an impressive government flat in Whitehall that comes with its own snooze alarm. Every morning they are roused from sleep by the sound of their upstairs neighbour trudging heavily-footed across the floor from his bed to the lavatory, pausing for a few moments, then trudging back. Their neighbour is, of course, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

Busy Mr Mellor

DAVID Mellor, former MP and "minister for fun", was invited recently to be the guest speaker at an Inn on the Park banquet held by Movers & Shakers, a group of British property industry leaders. The fee for his appearance was agreed at £3,500. Invitations specified "7.30 pm for 8" and Mr Mellor duly turned up on time. The only problem was that he had arranged a private meeting to take place in the hotel's bar. When eight-thirty had come and gone, a representative of Movers & Shakers approached Mr Mellor and asked if he would like to come join the group? No, he was too busy. Finally, at 8.55pm, the great man finished his private business and deigned to join the group who were paying him handsomely. Humble pie was obviously not on the menu.

Spotting George Michael

HOW eerie that George Michael was arrested for lewd conduct in a Beverly Hills toilet located in Will Rogers Memorial Park. It was Will Rogers, the American crack-barrel philosopher, who became famous for saying, "I never met a man I didn't like."

Mexican knicker protest

MEANWHILE, a group of Mexicans have come up with a unique form of protest. Bank debtors who suffered during the 1994 crash of the peso are up in arms about legislation being considered in the Mexican congress. They are hanging clothes lines festooned with underwear - including red lace knickers and white boxer shorts - across the doors of the country's finance ministry. As a smoker and drinker outraged by the last budget, Pandora is considering hanging a few suspender belts and Y-fronts across Gordon Brown's front door in Downing Street.

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Plastic surgery campaigner targeted

By Paul McCann
Media Editor

A MAN who has run a two-year campaign to stop plastic surgery clinics making extravagant claims has found himself the target of mystery phone calls and strange visits to his home.

Asem Mohammed, of west London, has successfully complained to the Advertising Standards Authority on almost 50 occasions about some of Britain's largest private cosmetic surgery clinics. Clinics such as The Pountney Clinic, the Nobel Clinic and Transform Medical Group have all been found by the authority to have made misleading claims in their adverts.

Mr Mohammed's campaign to highlight the claims of these clinics has been so successful that in December the ASA issued a formal warning note to magazines to try to get them to stop running adverts which have repeated the misleading claims. However, after being named in a newspaper article in January about the activities of private clinics Mr Mohammed has started receiving strange phone calls and visits.

On 10 February, a man in a red BMW claiming to represent an insurance company visited Mr Mohammed

at home and asked for information about who lived in the house. When Mr Mohammed pressed the man for his identity he refused to give it, but admitted representing "a clinic".

The Independent has since learned

that the car belongs to Alan Foster, sales manager of the Nobel Clinic, a Surrey-based hair-replacement clinic which Mr Mohammed has taken to the ASA on numerous occasions. When *The Independent* contacted Mr Foster he refused

to answer any questions about Mr Mohammed or the red BMW and switched off his mobile phone.

Half an hour after the man in the red BMW visited Mr Mohammed, a woman calling herself Sylvia from the



Plastic surgeons at work. More controversial clinics have been targeted by Mr Mohammed

Nobel Clinic phoned him to say the clinic was planning legal action about his complaints to the ASA - despite the fact they had all been upheld.

Mr Mohammed has also been plagued by phone calls from people variously claiming to be from BT, requesting his telephone account number, his bank, claiming a computer error meant they needed his account number, and a call claiming to be from the ASA looking for his address - which the ASA has had for two years. "I'm now pretty suspicious and I log the time and date of when these calls happen," he said.

Mr Mohammed began his campaign against cosmetic clinics' advertising after a friend was disfigured when a nose operation went wrong. His work has been strengthened by the efforts of Anne Chwyd, Labour MP for Cynon Valley, who has tried to have private cosmetic clinics licensed. Dr David Sharpe, chairman of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, has also supported his campaign.

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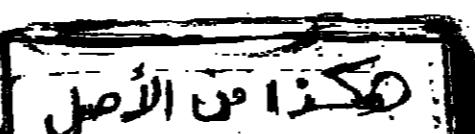


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Far-right returns with a violence agenda

BNP is stoking up racism in a London Docklands by-election. Ian Burrell reports

THE SPRING tanning is out on the Isle of Dogs. The appearance of Union flags hanging from the balconies and tower block windows is a signal that local elections are once more pending in Millwall.

The ward where Derek Beckon became the first British National Party councillor four years ago, is once again the focus for the far-right's attempts to fuel racial disharmony. The BNP is basing its new campaign on a claim that the white community in east London is being terrorised by gangs of Asian youths in what it recklessly describes as "something near to civil war".

In particular, the party has sought to capitalise on an horrific attack on a 14-year-old Maltese boy by a large gang of young Asians. Paul Sammut was badly beaten and one of his fingers almost severed by a knife wound in February. The incident brought angry protests from a section of the white community who claimed the police were slow to respond.

The victim's father, also called Paul, said the attack would generate votes for the BNP. "I think everyone will be behind them more than 100 per cent," he said, adding that he personally was not interested in politics and would not vote for the BNP. "We have totally had enough of it. We want rights for ourselves," he explained.

The Bengali community on the island later helped police with their inquiries and eight youths have been charged in connection with the incident. But a fortnight ago, up to 200 Asian youngsters from different gangs clashed with baseball bats, knives and machetes at nearby Poplar Park, east London. Three youths were taken to hospital and, although none of the victims was white, the incident provided more political capital for the far-right.

Edwin Lewis, who runs the



BNP councillor Derek Beckon (left), with a BNP minder shortly after his election. His brand of politics is growing in popularity in Millwall. (below) Photographs: Reuters & David Rose

multicultural St Andrews Youth Project on the island, admits: "At the moment, the BNP don't have to do any work because the kids are doing it for them." He said the BNP had adopted more subtle electioneering tactics. "They have realised that the mob rule and shaven-headed approach didn't work," he said.

Yet, despite concerns over some isolated yet serious incidents, race relations on the Isle of Dogs are clearly improving. Curtis Francois, 35, a black council caretaker, recalled: "This area used to be a no-go area. It was sprayed on the walls 'Isle of Dogs for whites only'. Things have definitely quietened down."

Marianna Norris, mixed race

and 26, looks out at the union flags from the kitchen of her eighth-floor flat. Another flag hangs in the window next door. But as a race harassment worker for Victim Support she has not seen an increase in racially motivated attacks.

"We have not had many incidents and things do seem to be getting better," she said. "I cannot see the BNP getting in because the ethnic community is starting to speak up and they will now go out and vote."

People who have moved on to the island more recently seemed to be unaware of its far-right connections. Michael Alford, 58, a ship's purser, asked: "BNP?... which is?" He

said that he would be voting Labour.

In 1994, the election of Mr Beckon was at least effective in putting a community that had felt forgotten into the limeight of national interest. But the shock card has been played and former BNP voters said they now feel the

party could do little to improve their living conditions.

Jason Wright, 20, out walking his pit bull, should be prime BNP material. Having voted for the far-right party in the past he regards the ruling Labour council as "a load of crap". Yet, he said: "This election, I can't

really be bothered. Nothing is going to change."

On the doorsteps, however, some Labour canvassers have been concerned that BNP supporters have been less coy about identifying themselves than in the past. Living in the shadow of the Canary Wharf tower, the people of the Isle of Dogs are made only too well aware of their economic disadvantage.

Tower Hamlets council argues that in six months it has helped to find jobs for 600 local people amid the waterside restaurants, financial institutions and designer clothing outlets of the booming complex. But many locals are unhappy with the new landscape. There

are concerns that a proposed luxury apartment development on a lead-smelting site could cause environmental problems without providing homes or jobs for islanders. The extension of the Docklands Light Railway to Lewisham will temporarily close Millwall Park.

The Labour-run council is only too well aware that it must address such grievances and fully mobilise its vote next month if the Isle of Dogs is not again to become a symbol of racial division and the subject of national contempt.

One of the sitting Labour councillors in Millwall, Martin Young, admitted: "People have a clear choice between us and the BNP."

Price of a pint still dear after tax

THE DRINKS industry is as much to blame as the Treasury for high alcohol prices, campaigners said yesterday.

Alcohol Concern said it was "disingenuous" of the trade to blame high taxes for the price differences which are encouraging smugglers to ship in drink from the Continent.

A survey of drinks prices carried out by Alcohol Concern found nearly half the savings were caused by factors other than lower tax rates in France. It found one unit of alcohol in the form of beer and lager cost an average of 50p in the UK compared with 29p in France - a difference of 21p.

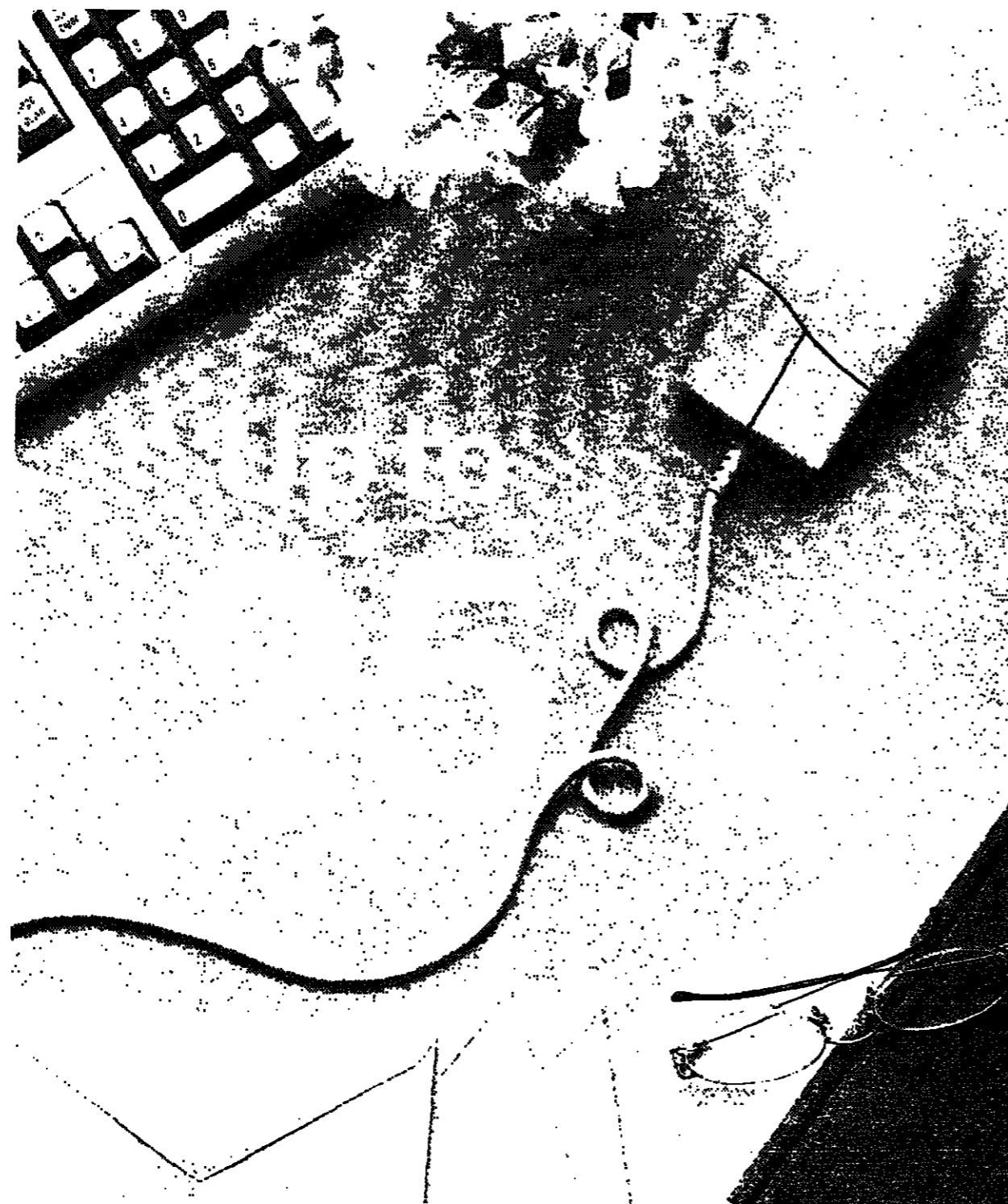
But only 9p of that price difference is due to the different duty rates, which are the equivalent of 11p on a unit of alcohol in beer in the UK and 2p in France. The report said that left, 12p due to factors other than Treasury policy.

In terms of spirits, the survey found tax made up a far higher proportion of the price difference. The average costs were 40p in the UK, 20p of it tax, and 28p in Calais, 10p of it tax. All but 2p of the difference could be put down to tax levels. The biggest saving to be made was on Becks lager, where price differences were 42p per unit of alcohol.

Alcohol Concern said it recognised that the cross-Channel trade in beer - estimated at 1.5m pints a day - posed problems. Not only did it cost the Treasury in lost revenue, but it meant vast amounts of drink were being consumed and often sold on the black market.

A spokesman for the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association said warehouses in Calais were able to offer very low prices because they were specifically targeting the massive cross-Channel trade.

He said: "Those shops have enormous turnovers which we can't compete with. But compare prices in pubs: a pint of beer in Britain is cheaper than a pint of beer in France despite the huge differences in duty."



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Rum and rice to honour the mountain gods



STEPHEN GOODWIN

Everest Diary

Base Camp

EASTER Sunday, and I have spent all morning round an altar drinking fermented millet and rum and occasionally throwing grains of rice in offering to the mountain gods.

Instead of the smooth limestone walls of a church nave we were surrounded by the ice cliffs and shattered rock faces that ring Base Camp – a glorious setting for an open-air service.

The *puja* or blessing is an essential ritual of Himalayan mountaineering. Without a *puja*, our Sherpas would not set foot in the Khumbu Icefall which rears up only a couple of hundred metres from our tents and is the start of the real climbing on Everest.

We had planned to go through the jumble of teetering ice blocks and crevasses that make up the icefall tomorrow, to spend a couple of nights at Camp One, 700 metres above our base here. However, there is a report of a storm on its way so perhaps we will have to be patient.

Whatever transpires, with today's *puja* we have made the necessary observances for our weeks on Everest. Any summit attempt is a probably a month away.

The service was already under way as I joined my companions on the Himalayan Kingdoms Everest expedition in the mess-tent for breakfast. Our Sherpas built a stone altar from the glacial debris several days ago – it is about a metre square and two metres high – and to their delight were able to find a *puja* pole to stand in the centre of the altar and support long lines of coloured prayer flags. Timber is in short supply in this basin of boulders and ice.

Perhaps the style of the pro-

Spirit of Everest: Stephen Goodwin (second right) and companions drinking chang as prayer flags are hoisted on the *puja* altar

Photograph: Howard Kelley

ceedings was illustrative of a difference between the Sherpa Buddhist culture and our own. Church of England services in my own sporadic experience seem to dwell on what I've been doing wrong, on guilt and the need to reform. The congregation would be expected to sit still and listen to how we could be better.

While religion is important to the Sherpa people of the Khumbu, they wear it lightly. Their form of Buddhism has a strong flavour of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion of Tibet – only a kilometre or so away as the Himalayan griffon flies – which included the worship of ancestors and the gods of the

mountains and streams. Pema, our *sirdar* (head Sherpa) explained to me how the prayers and offerings of the four-hour service would please the spirits of *Chomolungma* – Everest.

It was a heady brew. The 10 members of our team and as many Sherpas were seated on rocks around the altar. The sun was fierce but a chilly wind blew from the direction of the icefall.

Scented, if slightly acrid, smoke blew over us from the juniper burning in a special fireplace, and all the while a lama wearing a fluorescent yellow bobble hat and grubby anorak over his robes chanted

from small sheets of ancient Tibetan script.

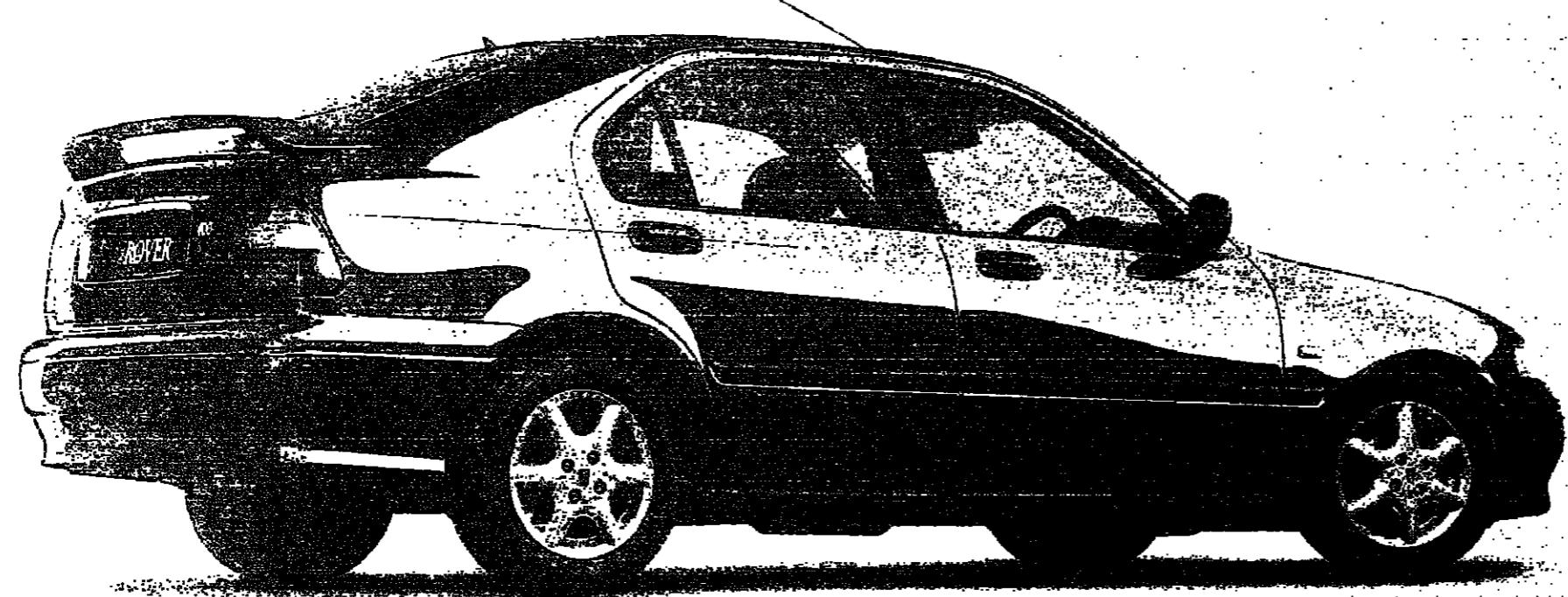
No one, except the cross-legged lama, sat still for long.

Sherpas kept refilling our cups,

first with *chang*, a millet brew

tasting slightly like a mix of scrumpy cider and sour milk.

and then with rum and vodka;

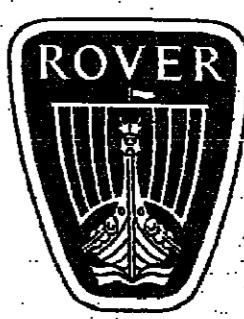


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Famine forces north to reunite Korean families

By Reuters

in Peking

NORTH KOREAN negotiators holding talks with the South agreed yesterday to discuss allowing the reunion of millions of families who have been separated for almost half a century.

Progress in the first high-level contact between the two Koreas in four years followed a blunt message from the South that large-scale aid to its famine-stricken northern neighbour depended on political concessions.

Talks began at the weekend in Peking moved to a working-level to discuss family reunions along with Southern proposals to exchange envoys and reopen liaison offices in the border-truce village of Panmunjom.

The Korean peninsula has been split by razor wire and minefields since the armistice of 1953, which still left the North and the South technically at war. Time is now running out for many ageing Koreans with relatives across the border.

Meanwhile, the head of the World Food Programme said in Peking that six out of every 10 North Korean children were now being born underweight.

"All one has to do is to see skeletal children in the hospitals to know that this not only is the state of some of the children, but that they reflect the state of their families and their mothers and fathers," Catherine Bertini said after visiting North Korea.

She added that the World Food Programme had threatened to cut back relief deliveries after the North barred its inspectors from 50 of the country's 210 counties, where it said there were sensitive military installations.

Earlier, the French humanitarian group Médecins Sans Frontières issued a report saying army and government officials were stealing international relief supplies, and only a bare minimum was getting through to the sick and dying. The report, based on interviews with North Korean refugees and Chinese travellers, spoke of cannibalism among North Korea's desperate population of 23 million.

The Pyongyang government has sought the current Peking talks in order to ask for as much as 200,000 tonnes of fertiliser. Three years of floods and drought have exacerbated the damage caused by disastrous

Pol Pot 'held' in offensive against Khmer Rouge

SIEM REAP, Cambodia (AP) — A senior Cambodian government general claimed yesterday that Pol Pot, the former leader of the Khmer Rouge, had been captured in south Thailand.

Television reports said that Ta Mok, who toppled Pol Pot a year ago and placed him under house arrest, had also been captured. Under Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime, as many as 2 million Cambodians died from forced labour, disease and systematic executions between 1975 and 1979.

General Meas Sophea said they had been placed under house arrest in Ba Sa-Ngam, about a kilometre inside Thailand in a mountainous part of the north-east, fairly close to the Khmer Rouge stronghold of Anlong Veng.

The reports come just one day after the Cambodian government said its troops had captured a key Khmer Rouge rebel base.

Khmer Rouge guerrillas who staged a mutiny nearly three weeks ago against Ta Mok to protest against his allegedly brutal rule were being supported by Cambodian gov-

ernment troops in pursuing him.

Cambodia's King Sihanouk made a low-key return to his homeland after spending three months in China. He was quoted by a Cambodian newspaper as having thrown his support behind a US plan to bring Pol Pot to justice for crimes against humanity. The king's arrival in Siem Reap, near the Angkor ruins, came amid a prolonged battle for control of the Khmer Rouge's Anlong Veng base about 80 miles away.

SA battles to halt Easter car carnage

By Mary Braid
in Johannesburg

A SOUTH AFRICAN Easter weekend means just one thing: carnage on the roads. Last Easter 308 people died in 221 accidents in a five-day period. This year Arrive Alive, a government road safety offensive which achieved startling improvements over Christmas, South Africa's other carnage festival, is being put to its severest test.

According to Moira Winslow, a road safety campaigner, South Africa has the world's third-highest road death rate after the United States and Japan though it boasts far fewer cars on the road.

Arrive Alive focuses on speed, alcohol and seat belt wearing and aims to saturate the highways with traffic cops. Ten years after the introduction of compulsory seatbelt wearing only 50 per cent of motorists put up to its severest test.

It does not help that more than a million pilgrims also take to the roads this weekend in minibus taxis and buses for the annual get-together of the Zionist Church in Moira, near Pietersburg.

The Easter weekend only accentuates the dangers that exist all year round on South African roads, which claim

Easter ceremonies test stamina of frail Pope



Holy orders: The Pope blessing the crowd of 150,000 in St Peter's Square yesterday. In his Easter sermon, he lamented the 'fratricidal strife and slaughter which reopened the wounds of ethnic rivalries' in both Africa and Europe. The Pope, 77, who looked exhausted after the long Easter vigil service on Saturday, almost lost his balance when he sprinkled holy water

Photograph: Paul Hanna/Reuters

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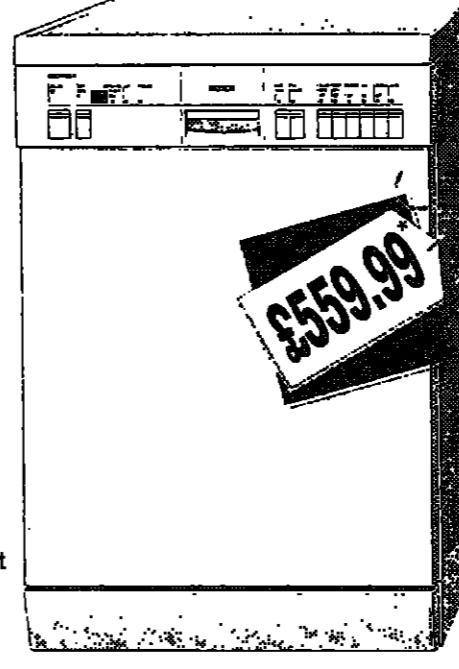


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*Manufacturer's suggested selling price

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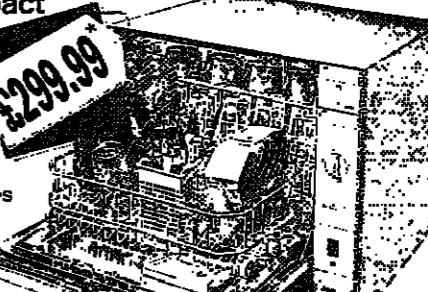
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India's PM takes to robots for Krishna

INDIA'S new prime minister, Atal Vajpayee, gave up a couple of hours on his day off last weekend to open an extravagant, huge Hindu temple in Delhi, and to extol the part Hinduism had to play in making Indians work harder.

It was an odd message to hear in the precincts of a temple built by the devotees to Krishna, the lover god whose most famous exertions are devoted to satisfying the sexual appetites of the *Gopis*, his cowherd mistresses. But the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iscon), better known as the Hare Krishna cult, who built the £4m complex, have developed a version of India's polytheistic indigenous religion which is quite as peculiar as that espoused by Mr Vajpayee's party, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The new complex, which includes both a temple and the Glory of India Vedic Cultural Centre, is the latest in a long line of epic architectural projects to be sponsored by the Hare Krishnas, who have 300 temples around the world. It is dominated by three, 90ft-high stone lattice work *shikharas* or towers, but its boldest innovation is a Museum of Vedic Culture, which features animatronic robots, supplied by the people who build them for Disneyland, representing Lord Krishna himself, other figures from the *Bhagavad Gita* (the sect's holy text), and their founder, the late Srila Prabhupad.

Although the Glory is now

Peter Popham
in Delhi watches
the fuses blow as
Hinduism joins
the Disney age

the whole are born not made, Hare Krishna converts all over the world. It claims "a few million" members worldwide.

And while Hinduism is a baggy aggregation of rites, superstitions, texts and practices, with little internal consistency, Hare Krishna reveres only the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is a slimmed-down, toned up Hinduism, fit to take on the lean, mean monotheistic faiths of Islam and Christianity. That helps to explain why Mr Vajpayee was persuaded to open the new temple, because the BJP strives for a similarly modernised Hinduism.

It was left to the Communist Party to object that in a secular state such as India, the Prime Minister has no business attending the opening of temples. But the BJP has few such inhibitions, and with a name like Glory of India, the invitation must have been impossible to resist.

Inside the complex, the Prime Minister told the assembled VIPs: "Some people say my government is opposed to globalisation. But let me say I am all in favour of the globalisation of the message of the *Bhagavad Gita*." He declared that the new national motto should be hard work in the name of God. "What we need today is the application on a national scale of the work-related ideology of the *Bhagavad Gita*. This will create a new work culture, and a new work culture will create a new India."

The Hare Krishna movement is one of the odder contemporary manifestations of Hinduism. India's national religion comprises a baffling pantheon of gods, but Hare Krishna describes itself as monotheistic, professing exclusive belief in Krishna, "the All-Attractive". And while Hindus on



The All Attractive: The Hare Krishna temple in Delhi, devoted to Krishna but inspiring exhortations to work harder

Photograph: Tenzin Dorjee

Satanists are blamed for priest's death

By Agencies

POLICE and clergymen in Colombia are warning that a Satanic sect may be responsible for the chilling and bizarre death of a priest and a woman member of his congregation from a poisoned bottle of wine.

Bottles of poisoned wine, believed to be laced with arsenic, were sent along with chocolates and sweets to at least 12 churches in the centre of the South American country.

The presents, sent by mail just before Easter, appeared on the surface to be the innocent and customary seasonal offerings of devout parishioners.

But at the church in Villavicencio, 55 miles south of the capital, Bogota, the unsuspecting parish priest, The Rev Jesus David Stenz, and Marina Rojas died almost immediately after opening the bottle and drinking a celebratory toast. Other members of the church saved themselves from a similar fate by spitting out the wine and forcing themselves to be sick.

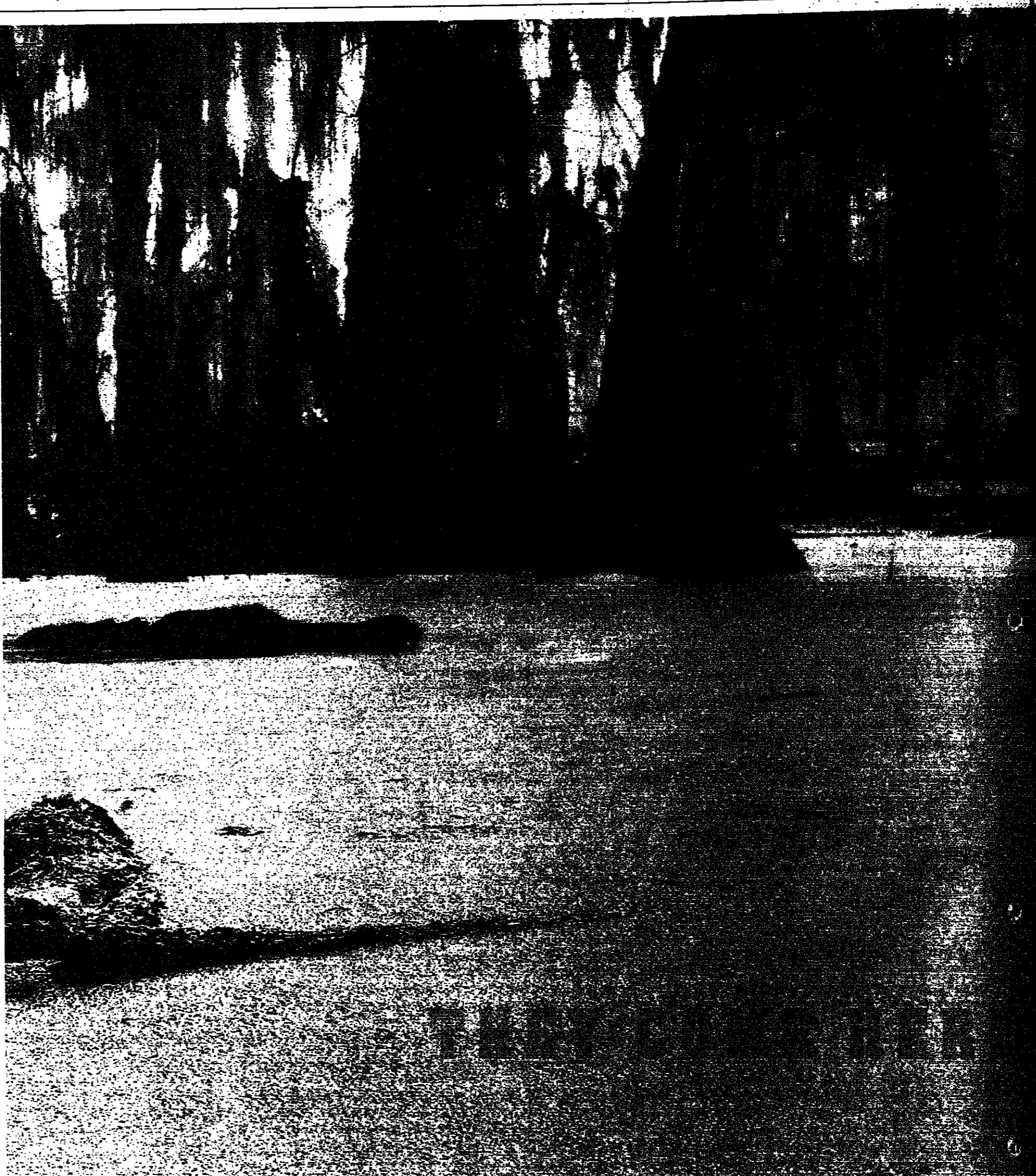
Another two people became ill after trying the wine at a

church in Sibate, just outside Bogota. The Rev Ricardo Martinez, from the church at Cumara, near Villavicencio, also received the poisoned wine. He warned that Satan-worshippers were preparing human sacrifices for Easter.

"Satanic sects could be involved, or criminal elements that want to hurt the church," General Luis Enrique Montenegro, head of Colombia's security police, told national radio.

The gruesome attack has fuelled widespread fears among South American Catholics about their church's loss of respect and control. The almost exclusive preserve of the Catholicism since the Spanish and Portuguese conquests of the 16th century, the continent has seen the arrival recently of a range of religions and sects mocking the Catholic church's claim to hegemony.

Many of these come from the US, especially fundamentalist protestants, and have won the allegiance of political right-wingers opposed to the Catholic hierarchy's perceived support for Indians, landless peasants and social change.



DAILY POEM

Barsoom

the planet Mars in the John Carter novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs

By Harry Guest

*It is a world that has been left to die.
Cold sun probes thinning air. The last canals
lead from the ice-caps under ruined walls.
More skeletons of farm guard field gone dry.*

*In arid light, waves of vermilion moss
break on abandoned wharves. Tall cities stare
from vacant windows past worn headlands where
the dead sea-bottoms roll through emptiness.*

*The planet is alive with echoes. Noons
possess no shadows. Nights are parched and chill.
An earthman stands alone, sword bared, far from
the double towers of threatened Helium
where Dejahl Thoris the incomparable waits
patiently beneath the hurling moons.*

This poem comes from *A State of Independence*, an anthology edited by Tony Frazer of work by poets associated with his magazine *Shearsman*, including Roy Fisher, Harry Guest and Lee Harwood. *A State of Independence* costs £9.95, post free, from Stride Publications, 11 Sylvan Road, Exeter EX4 6EW.

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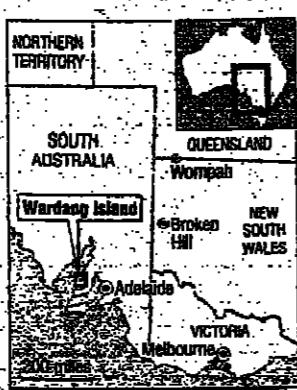
Rabbit plague stirs plot fears in the Outback

By Robert Milliken
in Sydney

"BLUEY" Adams is an Outback institution who made his living shooting rabbits, sometimes 2,000 a week. The closest he ever got to civilisation was Wompah Gate, a remote spot in south-west Queensland where he would hand over his haul to a rabbit-dealer once a fortnight, take delivery of his provisions and disappear into the bush again.

Now, Mr Adams, "Peg Leg" Johnson and other rabbit-shooters of their ilk have disappeared, perhaps for ever, thanks to a virus that has swept through Australia's Outback and wiped out millions of rabbits in one of the biggest wildlife extinctions the country has seen.

Australian authorities imported the rabbit calicivirus under tight security from Czechoslovakia seven years ago. It was quarantined for trials in the hope that it would prove to be the answer to a rabbit plague.



that was costing farmers A\$100m (£40m) a year in lost production from the grass and crops the rabbits ate and the fences they rubbed as they multiplied to about 200 million, more than 10 times the number of humans.

But in October 1995 the virus escaped across three miles of water to mainland Australia from Wardang Island, off the coast of South Australia, where scientists from Australia's leading research body, the Commonwealth Scientific and



Industrial Research Organisation, were studying it.

Spreading through the Outback at the rate of 13 miles a day, it reached the mining

town of Broken Hill, in western New South Wales, a month later, leaving at least 1 million dead rabbits in its wake. The virus has now reached everywhere in

Australia where rabbits thrived. Scientists estimate the death-rate stands at 80-90 per cent of the pre-calicivirus population.

If they are right, rabbits are now

roughly back on a par with the human population of 18 million.

Farmers are cheering on the eradication of a creature that has been one of their biggest

nightmares since rabbits were introduced last century (the culprit is thought to have been Thomas Austin, a tenant farmer from England, who released 13 rabbits in 1859 to provide game for shooting parties).

But the spread of the calicivirus is a story with *X-Files* overtones, leaving casualties and unanswered questions to match.

The biggest mystery remains how the virus escaped from the island, at a time when scientists were still uncertain about its possible impact on native wildlife (among which there are no known casualties so far).

Bushflies have been blamed officially for carrying it to the mainland. But Phil Newman, a former Sydney rabbit trader, believes the virus could have been unleashed deliberately by those with a vested interest in its wreaking havoc across the whole country.

Mr Newman and his brother bought TA Sampson & Sons, one of Australia's oldest rabbit processing companies, 10 years

Hopping into history: Farmers cheered the demise of millions of rabbits, but not everyone has welcomed the fate of one of the country's most voracious pests. Questions are still being asked about how a deadly virus reached the mainland from an island three miles off South Australia. Photograph: Alasdair MacDonald

ago. During the Second World War, the company exported 100,000 rabbit carcasses a week to Britain to meet food shortages. Up to late 1995, the Newmans processed about 14,000 rabbits a week for food and fur.

When the virus's escape hit the headlines, their business closed down overnight. They claim it was left with debts of \$A500,000. "You couldn't sell a rabbit now for love or money, here or overseas," said Mr Newman.

He has joined 50 other people and companies in a class action against the government, which they accuse of negligence in allowing calicivirus to escape. They are claiming millions of dollars in compensation.

The calicivirus first appeared in China in 1984 and spread through Europe before Australia imported it. If Mr Newman and his colleagues can wait long enough, they may take hope from an historical parallel.

Another virus, myxoma, was introduced to control an even bigger rabbit plague in the early 1950s. Myxoma, too, escaped from the scientists' clutches prematurely.

But, after rending Australia almost rabbit-free within two years, myxoma lost its punch, and the rabbits multiplied again. As Mr Newman put it, with a tinge of optimism: "Rabbits are very adaptable creatures."

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When dining out becomes a weighty issue

I AM suffering from an obsession with weight which arises every time I go out to eat. I am not talking about any hang-up of my own in this department, which, though entirely justified, has failed to take root. In the former Soviet Union, restaurant proprietors, rather than the clients, count every gramme. This practice particularly struck me in a small establishment in Kiev, the charmingly faded capital of Ukraine. Every item on the menu had its weight written next to it in large letters.

By way of adding legal authority to these appetite-chilling statistics, each page of the menu was signed by the restaurant director, the head cook and the chief accountant. We quizzed the waitress. "Tax police," she said. It seems that someone out there in the bureaucracy - still a veritable empire, alas, in this largely unreformed ex-Soviet republic - is totting up the tonnage of bread and butter, and even lettuce leaves that pass through each and every restaurant kitchen. My scorn discovering this was not shared by my colleague Lena, a Muscovite. All food was weighed in Soviet times, including ice cream sold on the streets. "I like it," she remarked, over her 250g of Ukrainian bread. "I know exactly what 200g of white bread looks like. This way I know whether or not I am getting my money's worth. Next time, I swear, I shall take along a pair of scales.

THESE might also come in handy at the Hotel Kiyvskaya Rus, one of this ancient city's main hotels, where value for money remains an alien concept. This huge concrete monolith, overlooking a football stadium, is grappling with the transition from government-run Soviet establishment to luxury hotel which actually justifies the sky-high room rate of \$180 a night. Similar battles are being fought - and usually lost - across the old Soviet empire. The jury is still out on the Rus, which is in the throes of refurbishment, but it is not looking good. Beady-eyed floor ladies - or *dezhnyi* - still patrol the floors, just as they used to in the old days, scuttling crab-like out of their lairs at the softest tread in the corridor. It is very tempting to walk around in the early hours for the pleasure of watching them hurry out, dazed and irritated.

KIEV DIARY



Phil Reeves

- still patrol the floors, just as they used to in the old days, scuttling crab-like out of their lairs at the softest tread in the corridor. It is very tempting to walk around in the early hours for the pleasure of watching them hurry out, dazed and irritated.

REGULAR users of the old Intourist hotels quickly learn the survival rules. I always travel with a pot-holders' lamp, which has a harness allowing it to be worn on the head while typing in the event of a power cut. But top of the list is the comb. You need not live long in the former Soviet Union before beginning to wish the divinities had issued us all with a fixed, unalterable, haircut at birth. The problem is the winter malady: "Hat Hair", caused by a combination of cold temperatures and static. You either turn up at interviews with a Ken Dodd-like spray of electrified hair or a flattened crop, bearing the imprint of the last object on your head - in my case, a tight woolly hat. The Russians are as troubled by this as anyone else. Next to every cloakroom, there is almost always a mirror, which few venture past without a bout of preening. This custom even extends into the heart of the 30km exclusion zone around Chernobyl. The place, 12 years on, is bleak, a monument to human folly. The surrounding countryside is almost deserted. And yet, before setting out, Lena and I found ourselves checking ourselves in the cloakroom mirror. God forbid we should be spotted on this wretched landscape with a hair out of place.

US Jewish lobby wields the big stick

By Patrick Cockburn
in Jerusalem

EARLIER this month, 81 American senators sent a letter to President Bill Clinton. It urged him not to present in public a United States proposal to revive the Middle East negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, which the Israeli government opposes.

The Palestinian position is that Israel should implement the Oslo agreement under which Israeli forces would withdraw from most of the West Bank which it occupied in 1967. This is the land-for-peace accord, reached in Oslo five years ago, signed on the White House lawn. None of this interested the senators. They simply asked Mr Clinton "to quickly urge the Palestinians to accept Israel's latest offer and move to final status negotiations". Given that Israel is offering the Palestinians just 9 per cent of the West Bank, the senate was in effect calling for the President to dump Oslo.

There is no mystery about the letter. It was pushed by the Israeli government, acting through the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac). This body is probably now at the height of its influence. But its ability to sway Congress and the White House goes back some 20 years. "Never offend three lobbies," runs an old Washington political adage, "the tobacco industry, the National Rifle Association and Aipac".



Deep belief: Ultra-Orthodox Jews gathering for a protest in Jerusalem in 1995. Much support for Israel's religious right comes from the United States

and 90 per cent for Lyndon Johnson in 1964. JJ Goldberg in his authoritative book *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment*, says that American Jews provide "between one-fourth and one-half of all Democratic campaign funds".

Its activism grew in the 1950s, fostered by campaigns to

put pressure on the Soviet Union to allow Jews to emigrate. Aipac developed in the Eighties as a link between the Republicans in the White House and the right-wing Likud party in power in Israel from 1977. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, owes his meteoric rise to his pivotal po-

sition during this period as the Israeli diplomat in Washington and New York who had support both in Israel and the US.

It would be a mistake to see Israel's influence in Washington as solely the outcome of the power of Aipac and the other Jewish lobby groups, as the alliance with Israel lies at the heart

of US policy in the Middle East. The British dominated the region after defeating the Turks in the First World War, but after 1948 this dominance gave way to that of the US, whose pre-eminence was confirmed between 1967 and 1990. In the first year, Israel's victory discredited Nasser of Egypt and the Arab nationalist governments. The Gulf war, when Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria joined the US against Iraq, left Washington without rivals and all its enemies in the region defeated.

At the moment of American victory, the US had less need of

Israel. Washington put pressure on Israel not to respond to Iraqi missile attacks during the Gulf war; it did not want Israel to disrupt its alliance with Arab states. President George Bush and James Baker, his secretary of state, pushed the Israelis into attending a peace conference with the Palestinians in Madrid. They held up a \$1.0bn (£6.25bn)

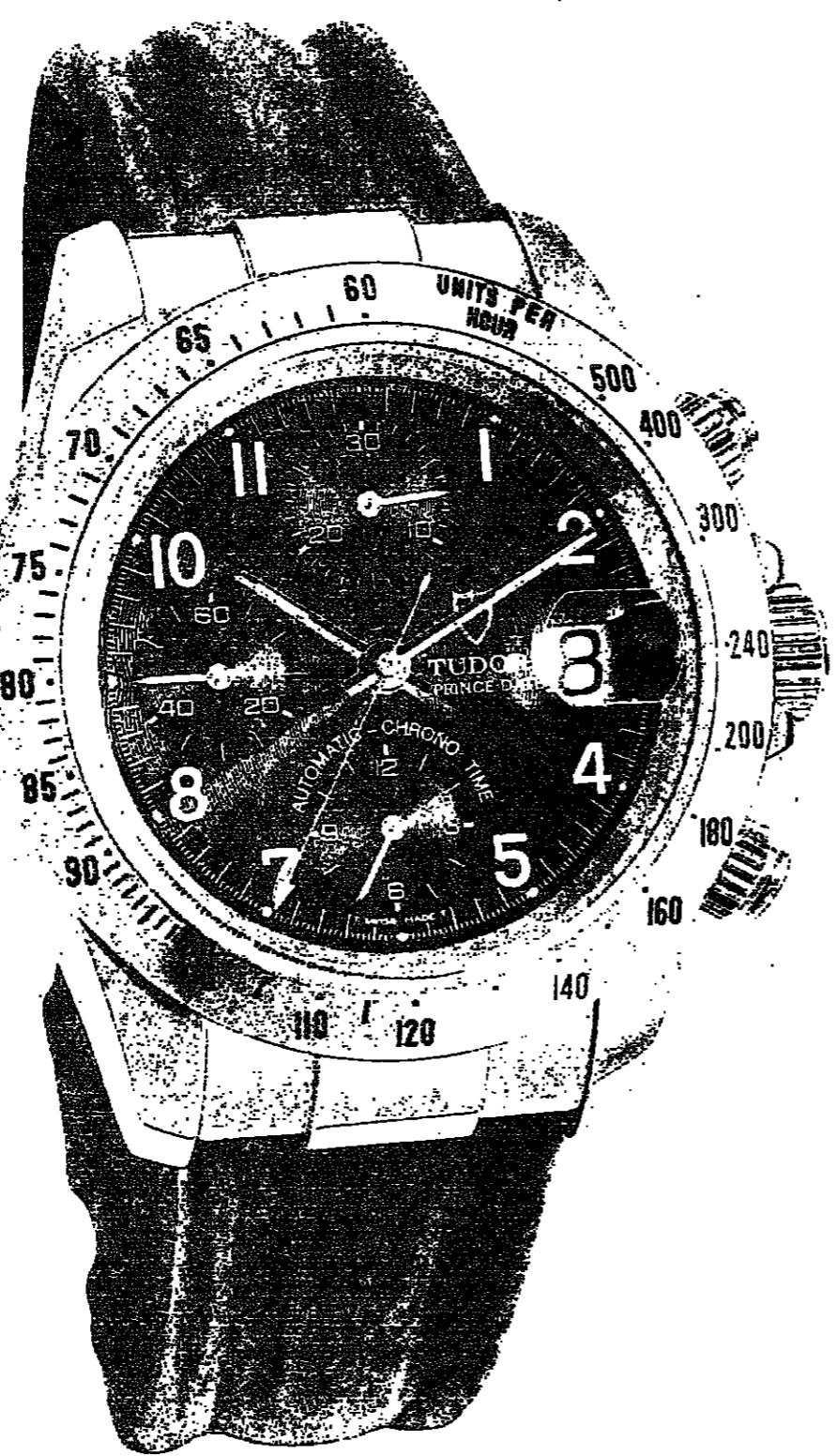
borrowed guarantee for the resettlement of Jews from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Mr Bush paid a price by los-

ing support in the American Jewish community. Mr Clinton, by contrast, is seen in Israel as its best friend ever in the White House. He claimed credit for the Oslo accords but they were really the product of Scandinavian diplomacy and doves in the Israeli Labour party. If anything, the US role was negative.

The Middle East has been the great failure of Mr Clinton's presidency. He seems to have decided he cannot afford to offend either Israel or American Jewish activists. The US may have decided its position in the region is so strong that it can ignore Palestinian self-determination. The next few years will show if it is right.

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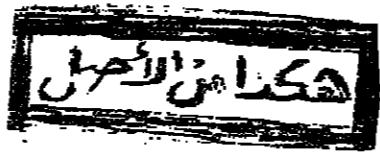
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How America keeps its ally armed to the teeth

The US is flouting the rules over the supply of weaponry to its Middle East friend. Robert Fisk reports from Beirut

ALMOST every missile, shell and bomb dropped on Lebanon by Israel over the past 20 years had "Made in America" stamped on it. Sometimes quite literally. When Israel was dropping hundreds of cluster bombs on civilian areas of Beirut in 1982 – in contravention of their conditions of sale – I found their white-painted casings marked "US Navy". Several contained timing devices with the abbreviated name of an American manufacturer, "Gen Time Corps", stamped on them.

In Washington last summer, I was shown a confidential request made to the US government by Israel for immediate delivery of 98,000 artillery shells of 155mm calibre; they were shipped at once as a routine military transfer, no questions asked or conditions attached.

For the single all-important and most sensitive connection between Israel and its American patron is the weapons pipeline through which pours a tide of US fighter-bombers, helicopters, missiles, shells and high-performance technology.

In 1973, the Americans were stripping their forward armoured units in the Fula Gap, Germany, to ship US tanks – in their hundreds – to Israeli troops in occupied Sinai. An Oceania airbase commander once recalled for me how half his squadron of US aircraft were painted in Israeli colours overnight and sent to Israel without consultation.

Almost every artillery piece, warplane, helicopter, missile and shell used in Israel's bombardment of southern Lebanon in 1996, in which almost 200 civilians were slaughtered, was American-made.

It was not always thus. In the early days of Israel's statehood, its young pilots made do with second-hand Messerschmitts and third-hand Spitfires. Until General de Gaulle imposed an arms embargo, the Israelis were flying Mirage jets. But America's armourers are now the mainstay of Israel's weapons supplies, providing it with an overwhelming military supremacy over its Arab neighbours while winking at the 200 nuclear missiles Israel keeps in the Negev.

In theory, the United States maintains some leverage – a much-misused word in the Middle East lexicon – over the use of its arms. But you only have to read of the day Ronald Reagan learnt of Israel's attack on Iraq's Osiris nuclear reactor in 1981 to understand Washington

ton's indulgence. The raid had been carried out with American-made F-16s, all part of a 1975 batch of 75 such aircraft sent to Israel "for defence purposes only". When Reagan's aides looked to the President for a reaction, he replied: "Boys will be boys."

As long as the Soviet Union existed – and sent its own ordnance to the Arab states – Israel could argue that it was, in the former defense secretary Caspar



Caspar Weinberger: Israel as 'unsinkable battleship'

Weinberger's phrase, America's "unsinkable battleship" in the Middle East. In 1968, the Israeli prime minister, Levi Eshkol, asked Washington for the sale of advanced F-4 fighters to offset Egypt's limited-range Mig-21s. The Pentagon argued that Israel had sufficient A-4 Skyhawks to cope with the Migs. President Johnson's staff then proved ready to trade 50 F-4s for Israel's signature on the non-proliferation treaty. Israel didn't sign but was promised 27 more Skyhawks and F-4s if they needed them.

In reality, over the past two decades, Russian equipment never measured up to Israel's. Syria lost two-thirds of its air force in a one-day battle in 1982 and its present stock of Scud missiles are two decades old. The last Hezbollah Katyusha to be fired at Israel in 1996 fell two miles short of the frontier be-

cause, the UN later discovered, it was manufactured in Stalin's Russia in 1944.

Paul Findley, the Illinois congressman who lost his seat primarily because of his criticism of Israel, has recorded incidents when Israeli intelligence officers had penetrated the Pentagon so thoroughly they were able to tell American officers the exact military location in the US of shells and other ordnance that Israel was requesting. Even when Israel was passed on US technology to third parties – when, for example, it secretly sent agents via Scandinavia to China to install new laser-guidance equipment on Chinese tanks in the 1980s – the Americans made no public comment. The Egyptians discovered what had happened when the Chinese offered them new tanks with Hebrew writing on the laser equipment.

The repeated "transfer" of weapons – as opposed to sale – means air-to-ground missiles are often sent to Israel with no conditions attached. In a long investigation last year, *The Independent* discovered a Boeing-Lockheed missile fired by an Israeli helicopter pilot at an ambulance in southern Lebanon in 1996 had been sold not to the Israelis but to the US Marine Corps. The missile killed two women and three children in the vehicle while the Israelis justified the slaughter by saying there were Hezbollah members inside – which was untrue.

It transpired that the AGM 114C rocket had been purchased by the Marines, sent to the Gulf in 1990 for use against Saddam Hussein's army and, after the war, was sent to Israel with dozens of other identical missiles as a *quid pro quo* gift for Israel's forbearance in not bombing Iraq. Not a single complaint was made by the United States to Israel about the attack; indeed, the State Department and Defense Department would make no comment on the affair even after 30 telephone calls from *The Independent*.

Israel's own arms industry – including the Kfir fighter-bomber and the Merkava battle-tank – has given the country a semblance of self-sufficiency but it is the US which gives Israel its cutting edge, and continues to do so long after the demise of the Soviet Union.

A powerful Jewish lobby in the United States sees to it that Congress raises no serious questions. Boys, it seems, will go on being boys...

The last word will be Rushdie



As the paperback of 'The Satanic Verses' is published, Australian interviewer Susan Chereny, soon to join the 'Independent on Sunday', finds its author in defiant mood

HE LOPES into the room, this man who needs no introduction. Lopes with a stoop as if the burden of all his troubles, all the troubles of the world, have been carried on these sighing shoulders too long and too heavy. The stooped back is silent, heroic eloquence. It has been six years since Salman Rushdie was sentenced to death by the Ayatollah Khomeini for defaming "Islam, the Prophet and the Koran". Six invisible years since he vanished into front pages all over the world. Six years since he precipitously assumed his drastic place in history.

And here he is still, ladies and gentlemen, coming down the corridor in flowing white shirt and trousers: manifestly alive, unrepentant - "they were worth upsetting" - and utterly ordinary. But not free. Never, ever free again.

He couldn't have put it better himself, really, when he began *Midnight's Children* with these words: "I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history."

And so it would come to pass. As so much of that first fabulist novel would come to pass. He realised even then that his words had a strange supernatural power. He should have ducked for cover then. *Taken up quilting as a creative outlet*. "It was spooky the way that novel prefigured what happened." But by then it was already too late.

The *Satanic Verses* was, of course, even more terribly prophetic. "It is all in there. It is terrifying, even for its author, to find out how much that book knew. It is one thing to sit in a room and dream up what religious fanaticism might be like. It is quite another to discover just how accurate the book was." It angers him, this "thing" that keeps happening. He is sick, sick, sick of it. Martyrdom sucks. Even though he has turned out to have a flair for it.

"I think if I were to examine it I would be very, very pissed off. I am bored with it. I would like to leave it alone for another 10 years. It is characteristic of such an event that a kind of false self gets invented by other people and projected onto a very big screen. You think, 'Who is that guy?' That is not me. Who is that guy with my name?"

The guy who subsides cross-legged into a wing-chair in his publisher's office is a small, round, balding intellectual with a greying beard and rosy cheeks. But the scourge of Islam looks, alarmingly, as if he might about to drop off to sleep. So heavy-lidded is he, behind the professorial glasses, that he gives the impression of sleepwalking. It is hard to imagine anyone less dangerous to East or West, less satanic, than Salman: than this apparently mild, talkative man holding a paper cup in flabby white hands.

"If you had asked me six and a half years ago, if you had described to me what was going to happen and asked me how I was going to stand up to it, I would not have expected to be here in one piece. I haven't been calm or wonderfully strong all along. I have had very bad passages. I have made mistakes. The early period was far the worst. We had no idea what was happening."

'If you had asked me how I was going to stand up to it, I would not have expected to be here in one piece'

to know how I am protected. Almost everything that has ever been said about it is wrong." He contributes large sums of money to his protection, which, when he goes to America, is "what Arafat gets".

There are flashes of the underlying, percolating, festering anger, the monumental outrage, at the injustices of his life, that smolder within Salman Rushdie. There are bursts of the petulance that has hardened public opinion, a glimmer of the guts, the refusal to roll over and play the victim that has been interpreted as super-egotism, but which may have saved him.

"I don't want to talk about it," he says, abruptly snapping off the charm, when asked about his announced conversion to Islam



Salman Rushdie: In the US, he gets the same protection as Yasser Arafat

Photograph: Geraint Lewis

in 1990 as a plea for clemency at a time when there were still British hostages in Iran. "It was a mistake. It was done at my lowest point. I shouldn't have done it. Full stop."

Most of the time during our long conversation there is the calm, the knowing acceptance of the survivor, the resigned at-least-I-am-alive stoicism of the trauma victim who has walked through the shadow of the valley of death and who, profoundly changed, is beyond fear. "I am not afraid," he says of the real possibility of eradication.

We will never know, most of us, what we are truly made of. Salman does. Salman has been persecuted. Salman knows now that he is a fighter. To the death. "I guess I have learned that I am quite stubborn and not easily shut out. A lot of people have committed crimes against me and against people I care about and that makes me want to fight. But this is a fight one has to win because the consequences of losing it are not conceivable."

At least it is the right fight; it is a fight about the art of the novel and free speech and the right of the ordinary person to say what they like and not have your word defined for you by fanatical purists. I guess what I thought was that, instead of these guys ever read 500-page literary novels, they wouldn't like it. No doubt several of them would say so. One or two might fulminate and I would fulminate back and that would be it. It was basically a comic spectacle with an irreverent voice. On the whole I thought *The Satanic Verses* was a story about somebody who does not weaken in the face of persecution and is merciful at the moment of victory" - dramatic pause to make sure the interviewer understands the parallels - "I don't wish I hadn't done it. I don't propose to be told, when to shut up by a priest. I am right and they are wrong. There is strength in that. I don't want to lose."

He has spent six years as an ambassador for his own life, travelling across the Western world, speaking to world leaders

in Italy, Turkey and Norway, and the murder of his Japanese translator, were, he says, "completely obscene. The Japanese man was a completely innocent bystander, the last person in the world who had any right to feel endangered. It made me a thousand per cent more determined to fight even harder. I felt it was about things that were bigger than me, my work or my book."

He has spent six years as an ambassador for his own life, travelling across the Western world, speaking to world leaders

'I started to feel that if this thing stops me from writing, that is a victory I am not going to permit them to have'

ers to demand stronger sanctions against Iran. "The degree of inertia from the world's politicians was quite stunning. I still think that if there had been any genuine political energy to solve this case it would have been solved years ago."

He used to find it difficult to get an appointment with the British Government, but he is quite close to them now. The Clinton administration has been helpful too. "I think that the very strong line they have adopted towards the Iranians is the only way to do it. These guys don't get appeased; they respond to strength and weakness."

And if by the seemingly awesome consequences of his own words, with which he had the impudence to challenge the sa-

cred texts, he has become the *cause célèbre* of the century, despite other dissenters and other fatwas in other places, then Rushdie, by that same power, may have delivered a triumph of the human spirit with his book *The Moor's Last Sigh*. A series of stories, *East, West*, was published in 1995 and a defiant children's parable, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, was written for his son in 1991. "Not being able to see him is one of my greatest regrets."

He has not been silenced. He has turned the nightmare into the dreamlike quality of his writing. Anxiety, as any writer knows, is not the place from which great writing springs. Nor is anger. Or hate. Rushdie has transcended the ugliness, found love where there was hate, strength where there was suffering, beauty where there was none, light where there was dark. And that is his victory. "If people are hurling hatred at you, write about love. If people try to silence you, speak and do it with force."

He has not been defeated. "There were times when I thought I wouldn't write again. I was sucked into a campaign where I lost a couple of years talking to politicians. Then I began to feel that if this thing stops me from writing then that is a victory. I am not going to permit them to have it. I felt that the best way to fight was to be the writer that I am and not turn into this kind of covering politician. At least writing a novel is a thing you can do in a room by yourself. I do have a great deal of anger about what has happened but I did not want to write out of that. I wanted to write out of its opposite, which is love."

And if words are his weapons, he will have the best revenge: the last word. "Everybody will be dead and my book will still be there." So there.

Taken from Susan Chereny's book *Talking Dirty*, published in Australia in 1997

coming up

From jabs to James Cameron ... a quirky look at the week ahead

Calling all vampires

"You won't feel a thing" is the unreassuring title of an exhibition opening in London on Friday which chronicles the history of medical needles. Exhibits include vicious looking 18th-century enema syringes and a piece of hide from the cow that Edward Jenner used as the source for his smallpox vaccine. Admission is free but one person will not see rushing to The Wellcome Trust's jab celebration is *Daily Mail* gossip columnist Nigel Dempster. Mr Dempster, who was found guilty of drink-driving last week, made his predicament more complicated by refusing to give police a blood sample on the grounds that he had a phobia of needles, he said giving blood was like "legalised vampirism".



Engine tuning

There will be no drink-drivers in Manchester's Albert Square on Saturday lunchtime. As part of the World Music Festival which begins this week, 20 cars will park in the square to perform a work by Stephen Montague entitled "Horn Concerto for Orchestra of Automobiles." More used to working with the likes of the London Symphony Orchestra, Mr Montague has been rehearsing with the peculiar ensemble, which will perform with horns, engines, wipers, indicators and alarms. Mr Montague says he is well aware of the dangers of working with star-struck motors. He carefully auditioned each vehicle to check the timbre of their horns when nervous. One soloist to watch for in the fast lane of orchestral fame will be the newly discovered virtuoso Nissan which performs with a two-tone horn.

No-smoking House

Politicians will soon be in tune with the health-conscious and PC among us. This week is the last where MPs will be allowed to *sneak off to the House of Commons* for a quick smoke. From next Monday the smoking restrictions in the House will be extended from a ban covering public sessions and committees to one affecting a large part of the House, including the lobbies. Marion Roe MP, Chairman of The Commons Administration Committee which is introducing the ban, said that responsibility for enforcement would probably rest with members themselves.

Unsinkable auction

You have seen the movie, fallen in love with Leo and Kate. Now is your chance to buy a real piece of the action. Titanic fever continues to float this week with an auction of collectors' items related to the ill-fated ship. Wednesday is the 80th anniversary of the tragedy, and on Friday in Southampton, auctioneers Onslow's will sell a variety of memorabilia, including a letter sent on *headed paper* from on board the boat - expected to fetch up to £4,000. Tucked away among such personal effects is lot 74, which isn't exactly antique. With an estimate of £80, it is a photocopy of a screenplay by a certain Mr James Cameron.

Michael Greenwood



Something for nothing: the liggers' guide to parties

EVERYONE likes to get something for nothing. In an age when the most secure thing about most occupations is job insecurity, there are other ways your employer can show just how much they care about you, you little cog in the monolithic machine of commerce. We're talking "fringe benefits" here, those little perks that nearly convince you you're not wasting your entire life for no good reason. With almost no preparation and largely using complicated methods like hearsay and chancing, and fully aware that the word "ligger" is derived from "least important guest", in a 10-day period, I managed to

crash several work jollies, to see just what the Man gives away when he gives something away.

Technology - Sony

Playstation celebration

Setting: Converted gasworks in Fulham, looking something like a 19th-century primary school, this four-storey building, containing several hundred people, has precisely four toilets. And the windows don't open. Make that a 19th-century prison.

Food and drink: There is no food, presumably as it's considerably easier to mop up regurgitated liquid. But there is an infinite amount of free lager (see lack of loos above), gallons of vod-

dy, and that dreaded German loony juice, Jägermeister, all served to you by barstaff so steaming even the punters notice.

Ambience: Sadly lacking, I know that computer games are meant to be the new rock'n'roll, or comedy, whatever, but there's nothing very glamorous about this motley collection of graphic designers, store buyers and geeky gaming journalists.

Music business - V98 festival launch party

Setting: Held at The End club in central London. Venue was excellent, even if the toilet attendant insists on staging at full

volume, possibly hoping to wow someone from a local freesheet as they dry their hands.

Food and Drink: Food pleasant, alcoholic offerings mostly produced by the non-profit-making sections of Richard Branson's mighty empire. So that'll be Virgin Vodka - with Virgin Cola, Virgin orangeade or Virgin limeade ... oh, and Budweiser.

Ambience: Fame-free zone. Any stars were keeping well hidden, though I was informed that a member of *Mansun* had been recognised, possibly by his mother. Otherwise, though crap was certainly being spoken, I saw no obvious nose-up abuse, and after overhearing yet an-

other road crew type conversation about delay settings, made my excuses and left.

Books - Faber & Faber launch

Faber & Faber's "penthouse"

Setting: Faber & Faber's "penthouse" suite in Bloomsbury to celebrate the release of Giles Foden's *The Last King of Scotland*, a well received first novel set in Amin's Uganda.

Food and Drink: A selection of excellent *hors d'oeuvres* (prepared by a "local woman"), decent South African red and Penfold's white.

Ambience: Life as a bookseller is hard. The pay is pathetic, junkies steal your stock of A-Zs,

and idiots keep recommending *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* like you've never heard of it and don't have a degree in English Literature already. These hashishes often end in violence - recently staff from rival bookstores came to blows.

Tonight sees the hysteria heightened. Being a journalist, Foden knows a lot of hacks and hawks drink like, well, booksellers. The celebrity count is Julian Barnes.

Wine trade - Champagne Information Bureau

Setting: Plaisterer's Hall in the City, appropriately enough. Beautifully decorated room.

Food and Drink: Champagne being the only drink acceptable at any time of the day or night - ever heard of a romantic gin breakfast? - the noon start presents no problem. Food - well, what do you expect? Chicken McNuggets? The finest spread of all, served up to the survivors, includes *paté de foie gras* (how long until the foie gras [sic] bomber starts threatening posh delis?), cured ham and artichokes, loin of veal, and quite possibly larks' tongues and manna.

Ambience: Well, you won't spot any stars here, unless you count Oz Clarke, from *Food and Drink*.

I discover that my uninformed choices bear an amazing similarity to those of real wine experts. Overheard snippets include a TV reporter telling his minions "I need a lot more spitting shots".

Best of all, I meet a rather sozzled, if elegant lady who once wrote a book called *The Chimpagno Dic*. She claims her finest trick, even in her dottle, is "The Gaiety Girl Kick", basically booting a flout of fizz from the hund of a presumably forewarned man, thus leading to marriage etc.

Jimmy Blackburn

TECHNOQUEST

Weather records/ Cats' eyes/ Blue Whales/ Noses/ Smelly eggs

Questions for this column may be submitted via e-mail to sci.net@campus.bt.com

Q Who kept the first weather records?

Our Eurocentric view of science and technology sometimes fails to credit the debt we owe early scientists and inventors in the East. The study of oracle bones from the Shang dynasty capital of Anyang shows that systematic meteorological records were being kept as long ago as the 13th century BC. The Anyang oracle bones also refer to rainbows, which were thought to be visible rain dragons. In the Song period, AD 1070, a double rainbow was described as being due to the reflection of sunlight from suspended water droplets. This was two centuries before Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi, a Persian, first satisfactorily explained that, in a rainbow, light is refracted twice and reflected once through a water drop. In Europe, the use of such a simple instrument as the rain gauge only started in AD 1639, but there were rain gauges in Korea two centuries earlier, and in China in the 13th century.

Q Why do cats' eyes glow in the dark?

The back of a cat's eye reflects a small amount of the light that shines on it so that the optic cells get extra stimulation – improving the cat's night vision. This reflected light shines back out of the cat's eye so that it seems to glow in the dark.

Q How big is a blue whale?

A blue whale can be up to 30 metres long and weigh about 143 tonnes – that's about three times the length of a London bus and about 18 times as heavy. Its large size protects it against predators, scaring other animals away; it is the largest animal on Earth. An animal this large could not survive on land because its own weight would squash it. In the sea, it has water to support it against the effects of gravity.

Q What is the evolutionary advantage to *Homo sapiens* in having a prominent nose, as most other primates have flat noses? (asked by Luela Palmer)

The nose serves two main purposes: to moisten the air we breathe, and to warm it. Races from Equatorial regions tend to have flatter noses, as they don't need to put extra moisture into the air they breathe, whereas people who live in desert countries tend to have longer noses as the air is very dry, and needs more moisture added. On the other hand races from colder countries, such as the Inuit and Tibetans, have flatter noses because the importance of warming the air you breathe is outweighed by that of not losing heat through your extremities. It's difficult to establish an exact evolutionary advantage, as selective pressures vary between different people living in different environments, but the overall advantage compared with primates is that *Homo sapiens* roamed to practically every environment in the world – and adapted through selective pressures to survive in each particular environment.

Q Why do bad eggs float?

As soon as an egg is laid it starts to lose moisture through its shell. This moisture is replaced by air, which makes the air sac in the egg larger, and the egg less dense. At the same time, proteins in the egg white break up, producing hydrogen sulphide – which smells horrible. This gas eventually makes the egg light enough to float.

THEORETICALLY...

Do you get confused over the difference between greenhouse gases and ozone loss? Don't worry – greenhouse gases really do deplete the ozone layer, according to a team from the US space agency Nasa. A study reported in the science journal *Nature* says ozone depletion over the Arctic will peak some time between 2010 and 2019, and be about as big as that now occurring over the Antarctic. The only solution to rid yourself of now is the idea that a thinner ozone layer leads to global warming – it doesn't.

If you aren't taught evolution, you won't understand biology at all, according to American scientists, who last week released a guidebook aimed at keeping the subject from being watered down – or even eliminated – from American school classrooms. "There is no debate within the scientific community over whether evolution has occurred, and there is no evidence that evolution has not occurred," said the National Academy of Sciences, which pointed out that without understanding evolutionary pressures, you won't see why different organisms have developed as they have. It might seem amazing, but teaching evolution is still a political problem for some American schools: the Arizona Board of Education dropped the word "evolution" from its 1996 science standards and North Carolina last year passed a bill requiring that evolution be presented as theory, not fact. Which of course it is – except that many Americans think "theory" means "hunch", rather than "hypothesis which explains existing observations and has predicted other ones".

You may have suspected this: women are more sensitive to pain than men, new research on arthritis sufferers suggests. But women are better able to cope with it, recover more quickly and do not let pain control their lives.



Outbreak: Bubonic plague victims in Bombay in 1994. Dr Brendan Wren (below) researching the disease at Barts

Photograph below: Andrew Buurman

Return of the plague

Scientists are in a race against time to stop the spread of a new strain of the Black Death. Charles Arthur reports

EVEN THE name inspires a shiver: bubonic plague, also known as the Black Death, still commands respect. You might have thought that it had its heyday, at least in Britain, in the 17th century, when 70,000 people died, before the Great Fire of London in 1666 wiped out the rats and the conditions that let it thrive. But the bubonic plague is making a comeback – and scientists are taking it so seriously that earlier this month, a project began which, by the end of the year, should have unravelled the entire genetic sequence of this ancient bacterium.

The renaissance of *Yersinia pestis*, as the killer is formally known, was signalled last September by a team of French scientists, who called it "clinically ominous". In a report published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, they described the discovery of a drug-resistant strain of *Y. pestis* in specimens taken from a 16-year-old boy who developed plague in Madagascar in 1995.

Though the boy finally recovered after treatment with streptomycin injections, he had not responded to the cocktail of antibiotics that is the classical therapy for the disease: and another antibiotic mix, containing sulphonamides and tetracycline, which is usually given to people who have been exposed to the disease, also had no effect. Has this new strain developed? Rather like the multi-resistant strains of TB that are now troubling the industrial world, it has almost certainly evolved from our overuse of conventional antibiotics. By using them at levels insufficient to actually finish off the bacteria, people have created newer and more lethal strains of the bacteria.

The French scientists noted that the danger could have gone unnoticed for some time, because many diagnostic laboratories fail to make routine tests to find out if plague victims are drug-resistant. However, a new project which began this month will seek new holes in the bacterium's defences. The Wellcome Trust is funding work by the Sanger Centre to begin sequencing the

4.38 m nucleotide bases of one strain of *Y. pestis*.

With that, new treatments could be developed.

One of the team who will be in charge of that is Dr Brendan Wren, at the department of medical microbiology at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London. "We don't want to be scaremongering," says Dr Wren. "But this disease is slightly re-emerging in the developing world. And rather



like TB, the treatment regimes could be made more difficult for the future."

The Sanger Centre, based in Hinxton, Cambridge, is one of the centres taking part in the enormous Human Genome Project to sequence human DNA. By contrast, bubonic plague is a tiny challenge, a million times smaller than human DNA. "They will get about 99 per cent of the plague DNA sequence within eight weeks. It's getting the last one per cent and putting the pieces together which poses the problem – that will probably take another four months," says Wren. "But it's an appealing idea, to have every piece of the genome."

Using the genomic information, the Barts team will determine what functions the different genes play by homology – comparing them with other, known genes in comparable organisms. Every difference and similarity gives a clue about how the bacterium does its work. The version being sequenced is not the drug-resistant

one, but it is a virulent form which has been widely studied. It actually comes from the US. "People do still get it there, through contact with prairie dogs and so on," says Wren. "In fact, the strain we're investigating [called CO-92 Biovar Orientalis] comes from a cat in the US – it was spread when the cat sneezed."

Using the full genome, the project might be

"We don't want to be scaremongering. But this disease is re-emerging in the developing world!"

able to develop 20 or 30 candidates for vaccines.

"We're looking for improved versions," says Wren. "At the moment, the vaccine against bubonic plague gives a bad response, and isn't always effective." By reading the genome, he and his colleague Michael Prentice aim to determine the weak spots of the bacterium: "By seeing what things make it invasive, we could delete those genes and make a less harmful version for use in immunisation. It would give the appropriate immune response, but would be less harmful."

Alternatively, by identifying the elements of the bacterium which provoke the immune response, they could extract those and put them into a different, harmless organism. That would produce a vaccine which would produce immunity without taking any risks involving the original bacterium.

The plague is not the only disease coming under attack from gene scientists. A similar project, due to start in the summer, will try to un-

ravel the genome for whooping cough (which weighs in at roughly 3.9 million nucleotide bases). There is already a vaccine against whooping cough, a contagious throat infection that mostly affects children, but it is not always effective and some parents are concerned about side effects. Even food poisoning is being studied: the Sanger Centre will soon sequence the *Campylobacter jejuni* bacterium, which presently causes the majority of food poisoning cases in Britain.

All three projects are being funded under the Beowulf Genomics initiative – which aims to decipher the genetic constituents of bacteria which cause infectious diseases, to develop more effective treatments. A separate project to sequence the TB bacterium has nearly been completed, and should report its results later this year.

It may only just come in time. Developing vaccines using genetic weapons, rather than simple antibiotic ones, looks increasingly like the only feasible path. Antibiotics have kept the death rate at 10 per cent, with most of those infected surviving if the illness is diagnosed early on. But with the rise of resistant pathogens, and given the fact that no new antibiotics have been discovered for decades, we may otherwise find ourselves in a Red Queen's Race against such ancient killers – running as fast as we can just to stand still.

In fact, we are already losing ground: the number of cases reported to the World Health Organisation by 24 countries in Africa, the Americas and Asia has increased recently. From 861 annually during the Eighties, the average number reported annually in the Nineties has grown to 2,025 cases. Without Beowulf, there is only one likely direction for that number.

Information on the genetic sequencing work in the project will be available on the Internet at <http://www.beowulf.org.uk>.

TELL ME ABOUT ... human facial recognition

NOW YOU see it, now you don't. The photo on the left, taken in 1976 by the Viking spacecraft, shows an area of Mars known as Cydonia. See the face, apparently carved out of the rocks?

Now take a look at the other picture, taken a few days ago by the Mars Global Surveyor (MGS) spacecraft. The US space agency actually planned the flyby specially, because ever since the Cydonia pictures were published in the Seventies, there have been people who have seized on it as evidence of intelligent life out there – a sign to tell us something. But what?

Yet the MGS picture shows nothing: no face. It doesn't even look like an eroded statue, which you would expect if the area being pictured was an artefact rather than an entirely natural formation – which of course it is.

So, why do we see a face in the first picture? It's a conjunction of a trick of the light and some fantastic neural machinery that evolution has bestowed on us. We see a face in the Viking Cydonia image because there are areas (more correctly, volumes) of nerves in the right hemisphere of our brains which are specialised to pick up the distinct shape of human faces: oval shape lit from above, eyes at top of nose, mouth below nose, chin.

Why have those developed? Because it is a survival characteristic for babies to be able to recognise human faces over other species, since they rely absolutely on humans for their survival. Other animal species have similar abilities to recognise shapes of their own species and predators.

That this function begins with babies is demonstrated because we can recognise faces in any orientation, in many sorts of light. We can infer the presence



Distinguishing features: the Viking photograph of Cydonia (left) and the new MGS image

of a face from just a few visual clues – again, a useful characteristic for babies, whose eyes can only focus a short distance at first. If a baby can recognise a blurry oval with

some eye-like shapes and mouth in the right place as a potential parent, it will be able to attract attention – and perhaps get fed – more easily.

By contrast, it's helpful but

not essential for adults to be able to pick out human faces from vague shapes. The Cydonia photographs show what can happen if you try to draw conclusions without remem-

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EDITOR: ROSIE BOYCOTT; EDITOR IN CHIEF: ANDREW MARR
DEPUTY EDITOR: CHRIS BLACKHURST
ADDRESS: 1 CANADA SQUARE, CANARY WHARF, LONDON E14 5DL
TELEPHONE: 0171 293 2000 OR 0171 345 2000
FAX: 0171 293 2435 OR 0171 345 2435
THE INDEPENDENT ON THE INTERNET: WWW.INDDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Give us a sunny bank holiday

FOR those of our readers not fully acquainted with the Dennis the Menace oeuvre, there is an episode in the television version of the cartoon in which all grown-ups are magically turned into 10-year-olds. The first act of the juvenile President of the United States is to declare in a television broadcast: "Everybody take the day off!"

Forget the levying of taxes and the defence of the realm: the most basic and irreducible power of politicians is the allocation of public holidays. And, yes, we – those of us among the fortunate majority who do have the day off – are grateful for today's. But we do have to ask, why Easter Monday?

The main point of it is that it comes after Good Friday, and thus provides the nation with an officially-sanctioned long weekend. But why should we have a four-day shutdown when the weather is so unreliable? Even if the sight on television of David Trimble with snow in his hair came as a complete surprise in your sunnier parts, the chances are that it is cold outside today. And we already have one long official holiday in which the only sensible thing to do is stay under the duvet.

The only answer seems to be that Easter is a very important religious festival and so deserves two bank holidays instead of just one. Which raises the question of religious symbols in our national life.

Unlike Good Friday, it is not as if the Monday after the Resurrection is a significant day in the Christian story: the gospels are rather un-specific about the precise timetable of events after "the first day of the week", which was Sunday. Indeed, many Christians object to the Santa-Clausification of what is, after all, their most important time of remembrance. Nor do you have to be a believer to wonder if we have not, collectively, lost the plot with this festival of bunnies, chocolate and television. Especially as the chocolate has lost all spiritual significance – what has Thornton's chocolate tyrannosaurus to do with even pagan fertility rites? And the television seems to consist mostly of golf, sexed-up dramas and *The Italian Job*. Good, but not worth watching yet again just for the bit where Michael Caine says: "You're only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!"

This Easter, of course, we have something practical and contemporary to celebrate. The timing of the peace agreement in Northern Ireland also has religious significance. When the Prime Minister agreed the deadline of the midnight before Good Friday, there can be no doubt that he appreciated its symbolic potential in a territory divided by a common faith.

It would be no bad thing, for instance, if last weekend's document, circulated to all Northern Irish homes as simply "The Agreement", becomes known as the Good Friday Agreement.

Religiosity is not generally something the British want in their elected representatives, and it is certainly unhelpful in some Northern Irish politicians, such as the "Reverend" Ian Paisley. But it has turned out to be one of Tony Blair's unexpected strengths that he is the first prime minister since Baldwin to say explicitly that he sees politics as a means of putting Christian principles into practice.

Fortunately, Mr Blair's principles – unlike Mr Paisley's – are inclusive and tolerant. It is not for a secular newspaper to judge who better reflects the spirit of the original Easter, but we can at least observe that voters should know as much as possible about the value systems which motivate their leaders.

William Hague, then, will have done himself no harm by saying yesterday that he preferred communing with God and nature in the countryside to going to church every week. In other words, he is an Anglican.

But it is when Anglicanism, or any other religion, intrudes on the institutions of the state – rather than on the motives of lawmakers – that we should worry. In the light of the settlement in Northern Ireland, the paraphernalia of an "established" church looks ever more anachronistic, with its anti-Catholic rules of royal succession and the right of bishops to sit in the House of Lords.

Public holidays are state institutions too. Of course, in an ideal world the state would not regulate the timing of holidays at all. But as long as it does, it should seek to drain them of religious meaning. This process is already under way, with 25 May called the Spring Holiday instead of Whit. But there is more to be done: Why not drop Easter Monday and give us our long weekend while the sun shines, in August?

Reading by numbers

EVERY year it is the same story. Easter weekend means traffic jams and a bust-up at the National Union of Teachers conference. And that bust-up is always the same. Left-wing activists who under no circumstances should be allowed near children denounce the Government and demand immediate strike action. The NUT leadership condemns them and lectures them on the nature of the "real world".

This year, everything is going to plan, even down to the relatively recent innovation of the leadership winning the votes that matter. So, when a teacher compared David Blunkett's plans for a "literacy hour" to "East Germany before 1989, where every lesson was planned and dictated by the government", the temptation is to dismiss it as mere posturing.

Here, though, the NUT does have a point. The detailed timetable for the hour, to the nearest five minutes, and the list of the books which must be covered, takes the logic of the national curriculum too far. The hour does not take account of the fact that children learn to read at different speeds, so either the more able or the less able are going to be bored by such narrowly-prescribed teaching. Mr Blunkett should lightened up a bit, and realise that he cannot teach all the nation's children how to read by remote control from Great Smith Street. But the NUT should concentrate on persuading parents that its members could do a better job if they were given more flexibility.

Best new books in the field: our springtime ramblers' round-up



MILES KINGTON

FLOODS ... snow ... fierce cold winds ... yes, spring is here again! And what better time to do a round-up of all the newest wildlife guides for you to take out on your rural rambles!

Here, then, are half a dozen of the best new books on nature of all the thousands we have been sent ...

Janet Street-Porter's Book of Country Wisdom

You've seen her striding out on TV from coast to coast, walking through the middle of crop fields or hopelessly lost in a small spinney, bringing to the study of nature all the piercing insight she lavished on the media world. Now here, within hard covers, are the most penetrating of her observations on the countryside, such as "Cor, I wish I'd brought a compass", "Blimey, these boots are killing me", "I fink I'm totally lost", "Ere, didn't we walk along this very same path about twenty minutes ago?" and "Hey – fan-

cy bumping into Jim Davidson here!" Endearingly dotty.

The Great Pop-Up Book of The Countryside March.

A wonderful souvenir of a wonderful occasion. Absolutely everyone is there, including – rather mischievously – Michael Foster. And is that a fox peeping out on page 23, halfway along Piccadilly? I rather think it is.

The Canal-Boat User's Guide to Nature

It may not occur to most of us, but the view from a canal boat is the same low-angle view enjoyed by a five-year-old child. Nature looks very different from down there. You see mostly the underside of things. In the case of hastily retreating coots, moorhens, and so on, you only see the backside of things. This, then, is perhaps the first nature book which sees nature from underneath and behind. No tree is pictured except for its lower trunk, for instance, and

all flying birds are seen from below rather like an aeroplane recognition chart. It will appeal to all canal-boat users, and also of course to all five-year-old children and dwarves, and pixies and cives.

The Colonialisation of Pets, by John Pilger

It isn't often you get an overtly political book on animals, but this is a significant enlarging of our view of the animal world. Mr Pilger has one single striking thesis, and it is this: now that the British no longer have an Empire, we can still fulfil our imperial role by ordering pets around. Our attitude to our dogs and cats is the same, he says, as our old attitude to the native races of Africa and Asia: dominating, demeaning, arrogant and harmful. He calls on the pets of the world to throw off their hateful colonial subervience and to bite the hand that feeds them. He points to Australia as the land of hope, where rabbit has constantly outwitted man, where budgerigars fly free

and where dogs in the shape of wild dingoes have set up their own self-ruling and independent rudimentary democracies.

The Fox-Hunter's Guide to Debate and Clear Thinking

The average hunting person doesn't think a lot. He or she just gets on with it. So when he or she has to defend his or her sport, he or she is at a bit of a loss. They can't see the point of saying "He or she" the whole time, for instance. And they constantly get trapped by clever anti-hunt people. If, for instance, a hunter says that hunting is the best way of eliminating foxes, somebody might ask: "Then why hasn't the fox been eliminated by now?" If a hunter says that the whole shape of the countryside has been made by hunting, some clever dick might point to a part of England where hunting has never been known and which looks the same as the rest. This sort of thing stymies a hunter. But thanks to this new book, the

hunting fraternity can now learn how to argue and outfox the smartarse city dweller.

A Hundred Ways To Annoy An Angler

As the author says, the best way to annoy an angler is simply to ask him what he's caught and then laugh, but everything else is here, from throwing stones in the water to bicycling over his rod from behind.

The Observer's Book of Dead Nature

Someone once said that 50 per cent of everything we see on a country walk is either dead, pretending to be dead or so uninteresting that it might as well be dead, but this is the first nature guide that fully recognises this fact. Copious illustrations tell you how to tell trees apart in winter time, how to identify dead birds, which dead leaf is which, what that skeleton means and why that fish is floating upside down. Well illustrated charts of animal droppings. Sobering and instructive.



THE MONDAY PICTURE

In focus: Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair mark the successful outcome of the Northern Ireland peace talks in front of the world's press at Stormont on Good Friday. Photograph: AP/Louisa Buller

Schools need more cash

DAVID BLUNKETT, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, in his letter of 9 April, gives only a partial view of education spending.

It is perfectly true that extra grants are being given to start on the backlog of repairs and maintenance under the New Deal for Schools scheme, that every school has been given a thousand pounds for books, that nursery places are being funded and the literacy initiative is attracting specific funding, all of which is warmly welcomed.

However, the money can only be spent as directed by the DfEE on these projects.

The great hole in education funding is the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), which has to pay for teachers' salaries and the administration of our schools. Even with limited recognition by the Government that the SSA was insufficient, no extra cash was forthcoming.

The extra funding for education was to be raised by increasing Council Tax. Many local authorities, my own among them, actually received a cash cut. Nationally it is estimated that the shortfall is approximately £1bn.

Faced with increasing bills for premature retirement and redundancy costs, with finding increased contributions to achieve matched funding from the Standards Fund, and with making up the difference between the perceived need as expressed in the Government's SSA and the actual level of spend (Wiltshire is not alone in having taken from its reserves over the past five years to achieve a higher spend on education), with Council Tax increased to the capping limit, there is still not enough money to properly fund our education service.

Inflation, increases in pupil numbers and the cost of the teachers' pay rise are all ignored by the Government. They have to be found by "efficiency savings". One man's efficiency savings is another man's redundancy. When pressed on this year's spending round the Prime Minister admitted it would

be "tight". "Tight" means that we have in Wiltshire over 300 classes in our primary schools with more than 30 pupils. "Tight" means further redundancies, wasting skills and funds which should be in our classrooms.

Only when the basic level of Standard Spending Assessment is honestly and realistically funded can this government hope to deliver its pledges on education.

JENNY SCOTT
Chair of Education
Wiltshire County Council
Marlborough, Wiltshire

DAVID BLUNKETT's letter (9 April) did not help me to understand Anthony Bevins' report of education cuts (8 April). Mr Blunkett says that Mr Bevins' figures "fail to include the £2bn sale of student debt".

The sale of student debt, which raises money, is treated under the arcane rules of public expenditure as negative spending: in other words, to include it would reduce the quoted total of spending.

Whether or not it is included, the receipts are in any event passed to the Treasury and it makes no difference to what is purchased for educational purposes.

Is Mr Blunkett saying that some of Mr Bevins' figures should be lower? Does he want some negative spending notionally included in earlier years to produce a notional (and meaningless) rise in expenditure for later years? Is he saying anything at all?

It seems to me that if there is a clear and present increase in educational spending, it should shine through the routine Treasury obfuscation of spending figures. It may even be noticed in the schools. It seems that it doesn't and it isn't. I draw my own conclusions.

WILLIAM ALLEN
Oxford, Surrey

LETTERS

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Spying on the spooks

DAVID AARONOVITCH is absolutely right to object to MI5's being allowed to shred or keep secret its old files on "subversion" ("The Government may know your secrets, but who told them?", 9 April).

It is entirely legitimate for those whose lives have been affected by vetting, purging and blacklisting (not to mention more nefarious activities) to demand to be told how such things came about. It is also legitimate for historians of the British state and of political "extremism" to seek access to the treasure-house of source material which MI5's records must surely constitute.

Most importantly, the British people are entitled to know the full story of what MI5 has been up to in our name and with our money.

The argument that all such considerations are outweighed by the need to preserve the anonymity of MI5's informants cannot be sustained. In relation to very old files, there is surely no duty of confidentiality to long-dead spies. Regarding more recent records, there exists a workable model in the shape of the American Freedom of Information Act, which allows for the identities of officers, agents and spies to be deleted from security and intelligence documents.

I suggest that in two to three years' time Suzanne Moore ("It's only common sense – hitting children is wrong", 9 April) does a follow-up article on the progress of this lovely lad, who has been given a personalised charter for a career in delinquency.

If it turns out badly, it will obviously be nothing to do with patrician parenting or bad law or facile journalism.

M J KNIGHT
Langley, Berkshire

West of Greenwich

THE French are not all longitudinally nationalistic (letter, 10 April). The small rural commune of Chalandry, about 15 miles north-west of Poitiers, has for many years caught the eye of motorists speed- ing though on the busy N149 by a smart sign outside La Poste: "Ici passe le Méridien de Greenwich".

Ironically it is Britain which is, in a real way, still divided on "which meridian"? Since 1884, the world's "Longitude 0" has been that which the seventh Astronomer Royal, George Airy, established at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, in 1851. But since the Ordnance Survey, begun in the 1780s, declined to adjust British land maps to fit practical reasons, these are still based on the third Astronomer Royal James Bradley's zero meridian of 1750 – which at Greenwich is 19 feet to the west.

PIETER VAN DER MERWE
National Maritime Museum
Greenwich
London SE10

Faith and treason

I WAS disappointed by the news that "Churches join forces to reverse decline in worship" (7 April). If church-going merely becomes "fashionable", churches will be full of hypocrites – modern-day Pharisees – and that will do no good. T S Eliot's statement "The greatest treason / to do the right deed for the wrong reason" is thought-provoking. Mere attendance proves nothing.

ALECHOLMES
New Malden, Surrey

Floating motor

ACCORDING to your article ("Booze cruise fears for QE2" (7 April)), the QE2 is about to be turned into a motel. Where will they put all the cars, and will the Captain have a parking space reserved just for him?

DAVID LLOYD
Bristol

THE single reason why I no longer attend regular church worship is the enforced and artificial greeting and shaking of hands that is rife among the modern church services. Will embracing, kissing and other activities in the aisles of our churches be the outcome of the New Millennium Challenge to the Churches?

DR NIGEL HIGSON
Hove, East Sussex

Much

The priest who paints what he preaches



Canvassing opinion: John Pelling in his London studio. An exhibition of his work, through which he protests against the ordination of women, will go on display later this month

Photograph: John Lawrence

By Clare Garner

JOHN PELLING'S paintings combine his objects of greatest desire and deepest disgust. For while he loves the naked female form in all its "roundness", he has a loathing for women priests, or "women-as-priests", as he prefers to call them.

Mr Pelling is an Anglican priest and fiercely opposed to the ordination of women. Being a graduate of the Royal College of Art, he has chosen to use paint not print to make his protest. "Painting is my preaching," as he put it, adding that one bishop congratulated him on his art, saying: "It raises such vital issues in ways which words cannot."

Pointing to an abstract painting of a woman dressed as a bishop, he says: "Instead of crosses on the mitre there are embryos, reminding people of the more female 'having babies' role. And notice the church falling down in the background."

He moved past "a fallopian affair" and on to another work, entitled: "Playing with a Mitre". In it, naked women are sprawled in front of the altar, fighting to

lay their hands on the mitre; behind, the cross is bent double.

The words: *DIES MAGNA ET AMAR4* – Oh great and bitter day – are inscribed above one painting, a reference to the day in 1992 when General Synod voted in favour of admitting women priests.

Somewhere in every painting there is a cross falling from a tower, and there is often a penitential stole reflecting "something of the sadness of the situation." The women are nearly always naked, thereby "exposing them in a context which looks unnatural", and their faces gleeful, an expression of "the way they are all a bit happy to be changing the Church of England".

Mr Pelling, 67, studied at the Royal College of Art from 1950 to 1954. He was ordained in 1959 and presided over a number of parishes, including Kensington and Hammersmith in west London. He knew Francis Bacon at the Royal College of Art and has always lived by a master's definition of painting as "trying to make a concentration of reality by a shorthand of sensation".

He painted "by night" while practising as a priest, but in 1982 decided to devote himself to art full-time.

Mr Pelling still attends church regularly and would not walk out if a woman was in the pulpit. He would, however, refuse the sacrament from a woman. He blames "the men" for the current situation: They were just "too kind" – "We bent over backwards to please these women."

Mr Pelling, who lives in Chelsea, west London, with his wife, Zoe, is exhibiting his paintings at The Air Gallery in Mayfair, London, from 20 April until 9 May. The paintings, some of which are 12ft long, go for anything up to £15,000. Any money he makes from the exhibition, which is entitled: "The Splitting Image", he will donate to Forward in Faith, an organisation which "helps towards retaining the Catholic tradition of the Church of England".

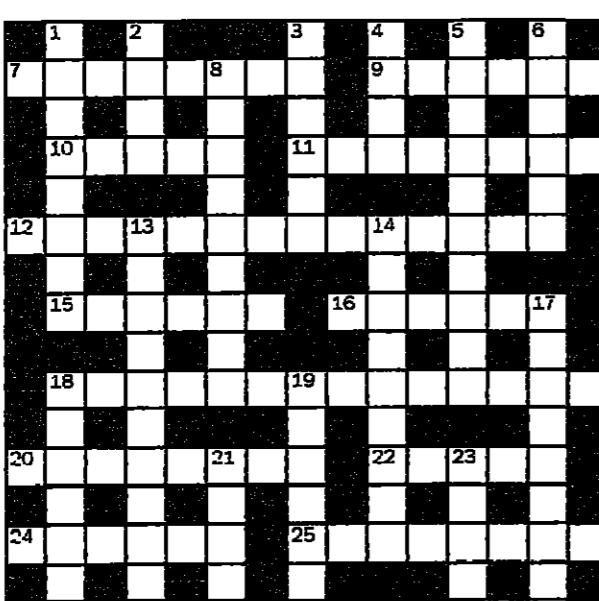
"I sound a bigoted old buffer," Mr Pelling apologised at the end of the interview. "But at the same time, I do love the company of women. They add so much. They are everything to life." Everything to life, but not, it seems, to the church.

I sound a bigoted old buffer. But I do love the company of women. They are everything to life

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3583, Monday 13 April

By Portia



24 Central parts of a Southern county, say (6)
25 Rex said no, being worried about trainee girl (8)

DOWN

- 1 Lady on the sun deck causes confusion (8)
- 2 Request money up front, mostly (4)
- 3 Restraining Greek character who's raring to go outside (4,2)
- 4 Common sense we expressed in French (4)
- 5 Felt upper chest initially becoming tense (10)
- 6 Good person can switch to key position (6)
- 8 Book a restaurant meal that isn't beyond one's reach (9)
- 13 Female runner? (6-4)
- 14 Be imaginative but get over ambitious (4,5)
- 17 Gold label's stuck on National Trust figure (8)
- 18 Church is cross about being under duress (6)
- 19 Mean to drink up and go (6)
- 21 Architect emerges from Joanna's house (4)
- 22 Energy's thus channelled into premier racecourse (5)
- 23 Yet takes time out supporting member (4)

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For more information, please contact

Neil Stewart Associates

11 Dartmouth Street
London SW1H 9BL

tel. 0171-222 1280
fax 0171-222 1276

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